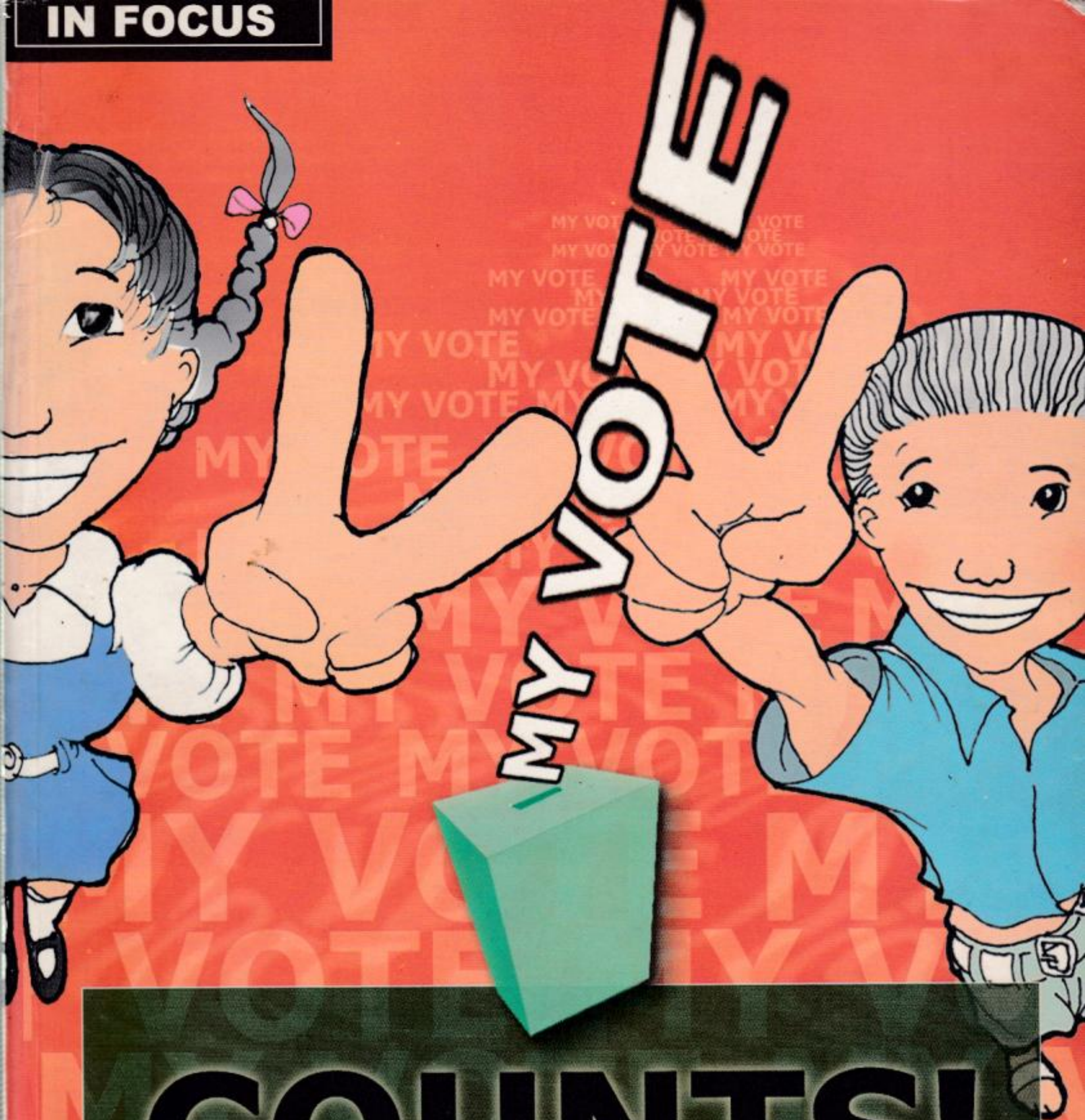


IN FOCUS



COUNTS!

A book about **DEMOCRACY**; what it means, how it works and how you can
MAKE YOUR VOTE COUNT

written by **Bindu Bhaskar Balaji** illustrated by **Reginald Goveas**



MY VOTE counts

A book about DEMOCRACY; what it means, how it works and how you can make
YOUR VOTE COUNT

WRITTEN BY Bindu Bhaskar Balaji

ILLUSTRATED BY Reginald Goveas



Every effort has been taken to verify factual details from a variety of sources. Books, newspapers, periodicals consulted include:

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LOOK FOR THE FOLLOWING TITLES IN THE IN FOCUS SERIES

One Thousand Years of India: The Last Millennium

Biodiversity: Questions and Conflicts

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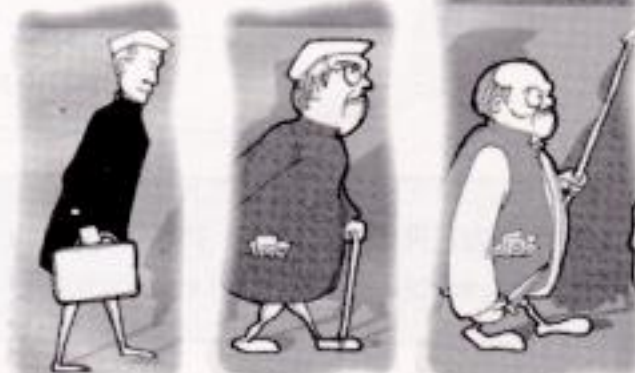
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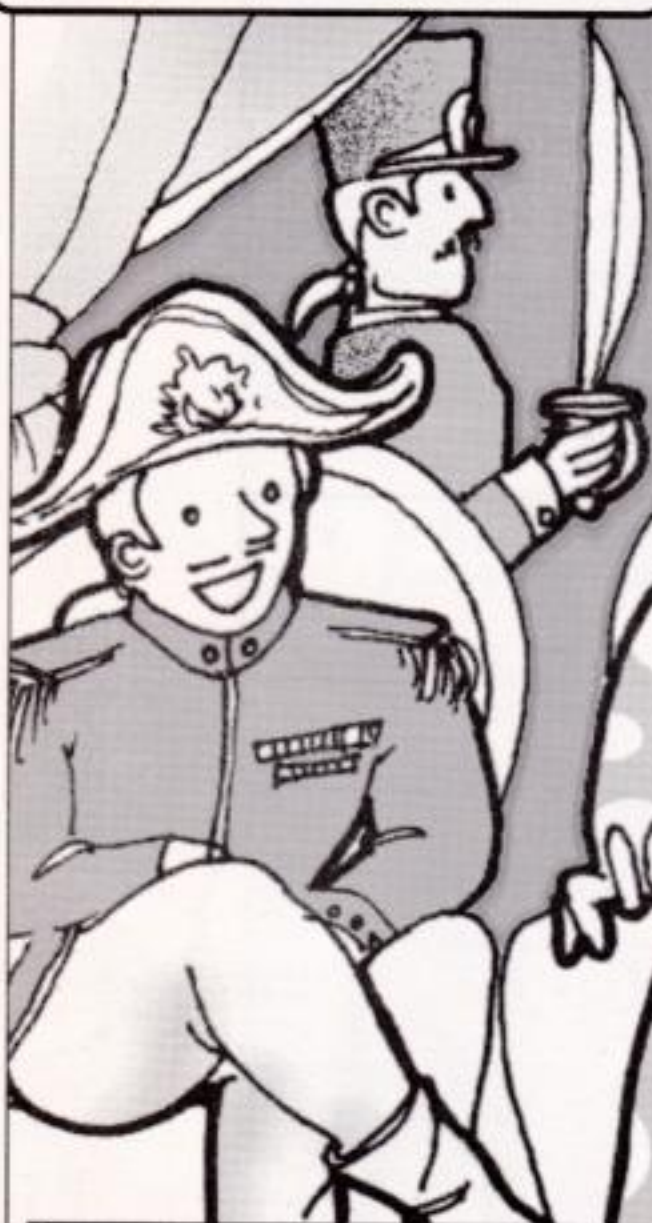
Towards fulfilling one's responsibilities as a citizen



Democracy is an idea that has grown with history . . .

The earliest Indian political unit was that of the clan. All members of a tribe were equal. The village community had its own assembly. Only the king was above this democratic body. Vedic sages created an outlet for dissent within this system — although the king was at the top, he could be challenged.

Chinese political thought in the olden days emphasised equality, and gave individuals the right to revolt against the State if it didn't act for public good.



The ancient Greeks were the first to see themselves as democrats. They believed in a system of personal democracy. In certain city-states all citizens would be members of a single assembly, their governing body. This was possible because a Greek state had only between 10,000 and 40,000 men — women and slaves had no political rights. Philosophers Plato and Aristotle developed theories of governance which later influenced European politics.

Ancient Rome had a powerful Senate and popular assemblies. Scholars say that the Romans did have a recognisable democracy, but it was imperfect. They had a Constitution, regular elections and voting by secret ballot. What went wrong was that some of the popular assemblies which passed laws and appointed officials had a voting system that was partial. A small group — an oligarchy — of rich, and often corrupt, aristocrats controlled the show. The web of family connections and vested interests created a very corrupt society.

Successful monarchies had democratic principles built into them. As kingdoms grew in size, kings found ways to keep in touch with the people. There are numerous Indian legends of rulers roaming in disguise to mingle with subjects, and of kings who developed public works that would benefit the people. Kings were directed to act by a code of conduct. There were elaborate treatises on the subject of good governance. One of them was Chanakya's **Arthashastra** — it suggested that a Cabinet of Ministers drawn from the priestly class should advise the king.

Through the ages . . .

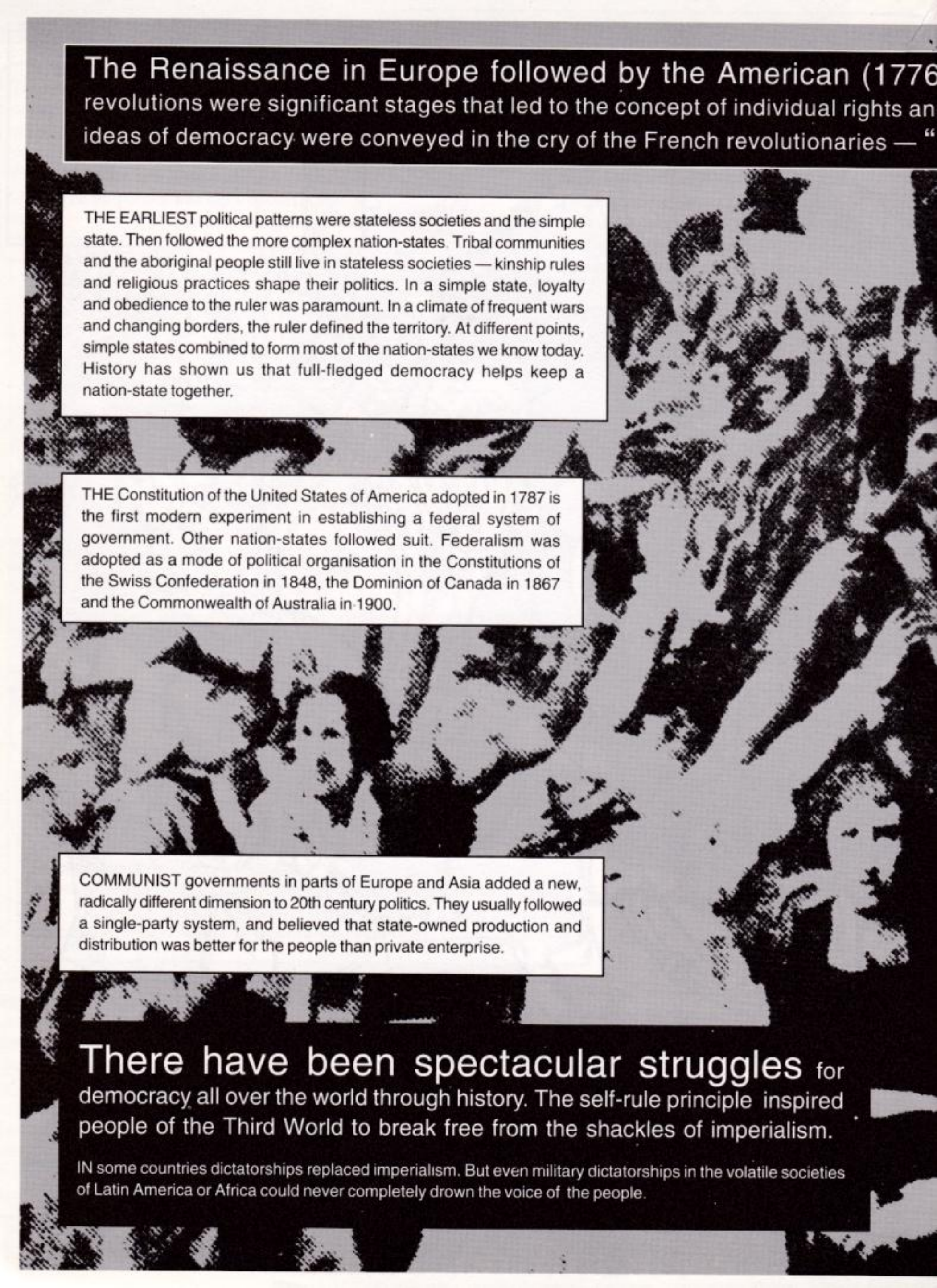
Magna Carta was the charter of liberty and political rights granted by King John of England in 1215, under the threat of civil war. It influenced British lawmakers later. The original charter in Latin did not mean much to the people then. But for future generations it became a symbol against oppression. Even the Constitution of the United States of America has ideas and phrases directly traceable to the Magna Carta.

The first House of Commons was started in 1295 in England. Citizens from various communities scattered across the country were asked to send members to represent them in London.

In Europe, kings would seek approval of their policies from different 'estates' — groups of eminent people. The three estates were the church, the nobles and the commoners. The origin of modern parliaments can be traced to these estates. Later the term 'fourth estate' came to be applied to the press, which has an important role to play as the watchdog of democracy.



In medieval India, Mughal Emperors acted on the counsel of their Ministers, a group of learned men with different specialities. Emperors would hold durbars to hear complaints directly from the people.



The Renaissance in Europe followed by the American (1776) revolutions were significant stages that led to the concept of individual rights and ideas of democracy were conveyed in the cry of the French revolutionaries — “

THE EARLIEST political patterns were stateless societies and the simple state. Then followed the more complex nation-states. Tribal communities and the aboriginal people still live in stateless societies — kinship rules and religious practices shape their politics. In a simple state, loyalty and obedience to the ruler was paramount. In a climate of frequent wars and changing borders, the ruler defined the territory. At different points, simple states combined to form most of the nation-states we know today. History has shown us that full-fledged democracy helps keep a nation-state together.

THE Constitution of the United States of America adopted in 1787 is the first modern experiment in establishing a federal system of government. Other nation-states followed suit. Federalism was adopted as a mode of political organisation in the Constitutions of the Swiss Confederation in 1848, the Dominion of Canada in 1867 and the Commonwealth of Australia in 1900.

COMMUNIST governments in parts of Europe and Asia added a new, radically different dimension to 20th century politics. They usually followed a single-party system, and believed that state-owned production and distribution was better for the people than private enterprise.

There have been spectacular struggles for democracy all over the world through history. The self-rule principle inspired people of the Third World to break free from the shackles of imperialism.

IN some countries dictatorships replaced imperialism. But even military dictatorships in the volatile societies of Latin America or Africa could never completely drown the voice of the people.

3) and the French (1789-1791)
ty between classes. Three fundamental
y, Equality, Fraternity”.

POLITICAL
transformation
can be a turbulent
process. In extreme
cases, when the political
system breaks down, the
nation itself breaks down,
as it happened in Soviet
Union and Yugoslavia. In
several pockets of these
nations, the transition to
democracy has been a
stressful experience and
has not brought the
necessary choices or
freedoms.

DEMOCRACIES are in a
constant process of
evolution and every nation
has its share of internal
tensions. The test of
democracy lies in
satisfying the demands of
various racial and ethnic
groups. Sometimes, the
problems have no easy
solution — such as with
the Tamils in Sri Lanka or
Aborigines in Australia.

MONARCHY co-exists peacefully with
democracy in Great Britain, the Scandinavian
countries and Japan — the royal families in these
countries enjoy a larger-than-life appeal and
engage in social ceremony, but play no
significant part in affairs of the state.





In their words

The basis of a democratic state is **LIBERTY**.

Until philosophers are kings . . . cities will never cease from ill, nor the human race. **Plato** *Greek philosopher (427–347 BC)*

A nation may lose its liberties in a day and not miss them in a century. **Baron de Montesquieu** *French historical philosopher and writer (1689–1755)*

The more there are riots, the more repressive action will take place, and the more we face the danger of a right-wing takeover and eventually a fascist society. **Martin Luther King Jr** *Black civil rights leader, USA (1929–1968)*

Civilisation is the encouragement of differences. Civilisation thus becomes a synonym for democracy. Force, violence, pressure, or compulsion with a view to conformity, is both uncivilised and undemocratic. **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi** *Indian freedom-fighter and Father of the Nation (1869–1948)*

Democracy substitutes selection by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few. **George Bernard Shaw** *Irish playwright (1856–1950)*

As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. **Abraham Lincoln** *President of the United States of America (1809–1865)*

Democracy meant all men were to be heard, and a decision was taken together as a people. Majority rule was a foreign notion. A minority was not to be crushed by a majority. **Nelson Mandela** *First black President of South Africa (born 1918)*



Aristotle *Greek philosopher (384–322BC)*

This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln *closing lines of the Gettysburg Address, delivered on November 19, 1863*



Democracy is a kingless regime infested by many kings who are more exclusive, tyrannical and destructive than one, if he be a tyrant.

Benito Mussolini *Italian dictator (1883–1945)*

Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried!

Sir Winston Churchill
Prime Minister of Britain
(1874–1965)



Democracy alone, of all forms of government, enlists the full force of men's enlightened will . . . It is the most humane, the most advanced and in the end the most unconquerable of all forms of human society. The democratic aspiration is no mere recent phase of human history. It is human history. **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** *President of the United States of America* (1882–1945)

Democracy is good. I say this because other systems are worse.
Jawaharlal Nehru *Prime Minister of India* (1889–1964)

The Communist system must be based on the will of the people, and if the people should not want that system, then the people should establish a different system. **Nikita S Khrushchev** *Prime Minister of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (1894–1971)

The youth of today and those to come after them would assess the work of the revolution in accordance with values of their own . . . a thousand years from now, all of them, even Marx, Engels and Lenin, would possibly appear rather ridiculous. **Mao Zedong** *Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party* (1893–1976)

My political ideal is democracy. Everyone should be respected as an individual, but no one idolised. **Albert Einstein** *Physicist and Nobel Laureate* (1879–1955)

From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.
Karl Marx *German philosopher, economist and revolutionary* (1818–1883)

To suppose that in any serious revolution the issue is to be decided by the simple relation between majority and minority is the acme of stupidity . . .



Vladimir Lenin
Russian revolutionary leader and founder of the Soviet Union
(1870–1924)

We stand for the maintenance of free property . . . We shall protect free enterprise as the most expedient, or rather the sole possible economic order.

Adolf Hitler
German dictator (1889–1945)





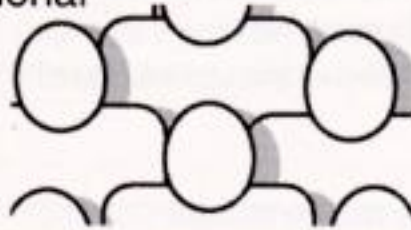
TYPES & TERMS



?!

Democracy

Derived from the Greek phrase **demoskratia**, which means 'rule of the people'. Democracy adapts itself to suit different political conditions. It has worked in republics and constitutional monarchies, presidential and parliamentary systems, theocratic and secular societies.



Martial law

Rule by the military as opposed to civilian law and administration. Myanmar is an example of a country which still remains under martial law administration. Pakistan and Bangladesh have been through phases of martial law.



Monarchy

Where the head of state is a monarch. People in the medieval ages believed that a king was appointed by God — this was called the divine right of kings. The belief virtually died out by the end of the 19th century. Jordan and other countries in West Asia still have monarchs. In some Gulf countries the ruler is known as the Emir. His male relatives occupy key positions in government.



Republic

Government without a hereditary ruler, where the head of state is an elected representative.

Communism

The economic theory of Karl Marx as described in his book **Das Kapital**. Its basic aim is the abolition of private property. The community, not individuals, own all means of production. This way wealth is shared more equitably and there are no wide gaps between the rich and poor. In a communist country, a single political party controls the government, which in turn owns production and distributes wealth. Revolutionary political movements brought communism to the Soviet Union and China, where ordinary people — workers and peasants — revolted against exploitation by the rich, landed class.

workers UNITE!!



i **DEOLOGY**
commitment to a set of political beliefs

RIGHT WING ►

political groups which strongly support the capitalist economic system — private ownership of industry and business.

◄ LEFT WING

political groups which believe that the government should own or control industry and business.

◄ CENTRIST ►

neither right-wing nor left-wing, but a moderate approach or mix of both.

Dictatorship

When power is concentrated in the hands of a dictator. In 19th-century Latin America, dictatorships arose as nations were freed from Spanish colonial rule. Caudillos or self-proclaimed leaders usually led private armies and established control over a territory. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna in Mexico and Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina are two such dictators. Later 20th-century dictators were national rather than provincial leaders. They were often made powerful by the military — e.g. Juan Peron of Argentina — or were military officers themselves — e.g. General Augusto Pinochet of Chile.



Fascism

A right-wing, nationalist, totalitarian movement or government. The 20th century has seen three main periods of fascism — in Italy under the Fascists (1922-1943), in Germany under the Nazis (1933-1945) and in Spain under the Falange Espanola (1939-1975). There is usually one leader who mesmerises the nation, be it a Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler or Frederico Franco. The defeat of Germany and Italy in the Second World War ended fascism in these countries. The Spanish fascists held on to power mainly by remaining neutral in this war.

Totalitarianism

When the government is all-powerful and will not tolerate any opposition. Some typical characteristics of totalitarian regimes are: secret police, ban on opposition, control of media and propaganda through education. Freedoms are subjugated to ideology, as in the case of Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia.

Dissidence

Disagreeing with actions taken by the government or party leaders. In totalitarian states, there is no room for disagreement!

Separatism

Political movement by a small group for independence from the large group to which it belongs — e.g. the demand for Khalistan by Sikh militants in Punjab in the 1980s or the demand for Eelam by Tamil militants in Sri Lanka. Such movements often become violent.

Secession

Formal withdrawal of a group from a political party, church or country.

Decentralisation

When power is not concentrated in a central authority but shared with local bodies.

Federalism

When power is divided between central and regional governments. Each has its own area of authority. An effective way of achieving national unity in a diverse country.

Welfare State

When the state offers social support to its citizens, especially the underprivileged. The Scandinavian countries have the most liberal welfare schemes for their citizens.

Vox populi

The 'voice of the people' in Latin. Revolutions have started, monarchies been dethroned and governments toppled in the name of vox populi.

Theocracy

A state or government which is run by the clergy and is religion-based. A recent example is Iran — religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah, Reza Pahlavi, in 1979. Theocracy gains ground when religious fundamentalism spreads. Although Iran has a moderate leadership now, it remains a theocratic state, an Islamic republic.

Fundamentalism

When politics and society are strongly influenced by narrow-minded ideas, often based on religion. When a fundamentalist group grabs political power, it imposes a strict moral code of conduct on citizens. For instance, the Taliban in Afghanistan has banned men from shaving their beards and women from taking up jobs.

Secularism

Stresses human rather than religious values. This kind of free-thinking was a powerful force during the Renaissance in Europe. In the 19th century, secularism meant keeping a distance from religion-based ideas. Modern secular states choose not to have an official religion, or to remain equidistant from all religions. A country may choose to be secular even if its citizens practise a particular faith. While Iraq has a Muslim majority, it is a secular republic.



As *YOU* & *I* know it



EQUALITY FOR ALL

All citizens are equal under the law — the government must protect them, their possessions and their rights.

VOTING RIGHTS

In most democracies, age, residence and citizenship are the only legal requirements for voting, or for holding public office. Citizens can vote by secret ballot, so they are free from force or bribes.

DEMOCRACY?

What is It is a word we hear often and almost always take for granted. Its history shows how societies tried to build fairness into their system of ruling. Sometimes the systems failed; sometimes they evolved. Over thousands of years, democracy crystallised into something more definite.

INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY

In a democracy it is the government's duty to protect basic individual liberty. This also means that every citizen is entitled to certain fundamental rights and freedoms. They include the right to free speech, the right to religious worship and so on. The Indian Constitution terms these the Fundamental Rights while the US Constitution calls them the Bill of Rights.

ELECTIONS

Why hold regular elections? To give people a chance to choose their representatives and change them if they don't do their job well. To get the people's opinion on the political future of their country. The prospect of being voted out of office should keep leaders on their toes — but this doesn't always happen, does it?

MAJORITY RULE

The judgement of the majority is accepted as being more valid than the judgement of a few. A noble idea which works best if all citizens have equal access to the tools — such as education — that help them make an informed choice. In elections, candidates need a majority to win. The political party which gets a majority of seats in Parliament forms the government. A simple majority, i.e. more than half, is required to pass laws. In major matters, such as changing the Constitution, a higher majority is needed.



POLITICAL PARTIES

Elections make no sense if there are no political parties. Voters need a choice of candidates who represent different interests and points of view. The United States of America and Britain have two dominant parties. India — because of its infinite diversity — follows a multi-party system.

Individual
LIBE

THE ACCOUNTABILITY FACTOR

Public officials are subject to the law and must be answerable to the people. Politicians and government officials may be removed from office for lawless behaviour. So in a democracy the people are actually more important than officials or politicians. If it often appears to be the other way round, then it means that the democratic machinery is creaking.

CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT

What is a Constitution? It is a written set of rules outlining the powers and duties of the government. It also says how laws should be made and enforced. Britain, strangely, has no written Constitution although it is one of the strongest democracies. It follows laws, customs and conventions built up over centuries.

PARTIES

MAJORITY



Did you know?

In 920 AD, the Cholas had a written Constitution. It laid down rules for elections to village assemblies. Candidates had to be between 35 and 70 years old, belong to the place and own property. An elected representative could serve only one term at a time, but could stand for election again after a specified gap. Steps were taken to prevent any family from getting too powerful. The Constitution had special laws against corruption and criminalisation. The guilty were disqualified for life. Those who had committed the five great sins — pancha maha pataka — could never stand for election.

CONTROLS ON POWER

It is necessary to prevent any person or branch of government from becoming too powerful. The three arms of government — executive, legislature and judiciary — keep a check on one another. Powers are divided between the Centre and the States. The States in turn must give power to bodies of local self-government — the zilla parishads, panchayats and so on.

Acc

Power

A democracy can either follow the parliamentary system as in India, Britain and Australia or the presidential system as in the USA. Germany has a head of state known as the Chancellor with a similar status to that of the US President. In some parliamentary systems, there is a titular President — a President with limited powers. The real power is with the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. They, in turn, are responsible to a parliament of representatives elected by the people. **The bottom line is: directly or indirectly, in a democracy people are always the most important.**

The world at large

The OLD . . .

The USA and Britain are two of the most established democracies in the world. Both have two Houses of Legislature. The US Congress has a House of Representatives and a Senate. The British Parliament has a House of Lords and a House of Commons.

In the US the people elect representatives to both Houses of Congress. They also elect the President directly. The President chooses people for his team, but they don't belong to the Congress. The Constitution is the highest authority and the Supreme Court is its guardian.

In Britain the people directly elect only the members of the House of Commons. The winning party chooses the Prime Minister from among its elected candidates. The PM is appointed by the Crown and chooses a team from members of the party. Representatives to the House of Lords are not elected by the people. Most are hereditary peers — the titled aristocrats — and some are appointed by the Crown. Parliament is the supreme authority.

. . . and the NEW

Is East Timor an emerging democracy?

In the 1970s the Portuguese left the colony of East Timor and it became a part of Indonesia, its 27th province. There were, however, groups which carried on a movement for independence. Finally, on August 30, 1999 the people of East Timor voted for independence in a referendum sponsored by the United Nations. But the story didn't end there. Pro-Indonesian armed militia began terrorising them into submission. The struggle continues.

Maybe you could keep track of events in that distant corner of Asia to see how the Indonesians and East Timorese work out their problems.

REFERENDUMS are used in democracies to resolve complex issues. Italy and New Zealand used it for radical changes in their political systems. Australia planned a referendum in November 1999 to decide whether or not to cut links with the British monarchy. Governments often use referendums to endorse a policy which they feel certain about winning, but sometimes they can be caught by surprise if the people vote against an issue.

Five major democracies — India, the USA, Germany, Japan and Israel — have never held a nationwide referendum. Of the 17 democracies in Western Europe, only 3 — Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway — have no provision for referendums in their Constitutions.

Here is a world map. Create a code using colours and patterns of your choice. **Shade the areas** that represent

(1) **ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES.** Look for countries which have had a functioning democracy for centuries, e.g. the United States, or for several decades, e.g. India

(2) **FLEDGLING DEMOCRACIES.** Look for countries that have opted for democracy in the last 10 years, e.g. Eastern Europe and South Africa

(3) **ASPIRING DEMOCRACIES.** Look for countries that have taken the first steps towards democracy, e.g. Indonesia

Further identify:

(a) democracies which are constitutional monarchies

(b) democracies that follow the presidential system

(c) parliamentary democracies

(d) former democracies

Count how many democracies there are among the economically advanced countries. **Compare** that with the situation in the developing world. While you are at it, perhaps, you can look for other forms of governments too.

Identify the communist countries, e.g. China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam. Look out for dictatorships in Africa, Asia and South America.

Look for democracies in this world map





Pages from the Indian Past

REPUBLICAN forms of government existed in many parts of ancient India. Buddhist literature has references to Kshudrak Malla Sangha, a republican federation in the 4th century BC that is said to have offered strong resistance to Alexander the Great. The Greeks have also recorded other instances of republican governments in the region. Some of them were democratic in character. Others were aristocratic, which means that the nobility played an important part in ruling the State.

In earlier republics, all adults had the right to vote. They could also be present in the general assembly which decided on major issues. As communities grew in size and societies became more complex, it became difficult for everyone to be as directly involved as before. A system of elections evolved. One person would be elected to represent a group or a region in the government, quite like how it happens today. There are references to election, referendum and ballot papers in writings on ancient Indian polity. How exactly they went about elections, however, is not very clear. In some aristocratic republics, families could vote as a unit. In others, all adult males could vote. Even foreigners could vote — if they became citizens.

A vote was known as 'ch'chanda' in some places. This Sanskrit word has several meanings, one of which is 'wish'. So it conveys the idea that voting was an expression of free will. There are also references to 'shalaka', a voting pin, distributed by special officers during elections. Voting could be done in secret or openly. How were the shalakas used? Not sure, but for a guess, when the pins were returned perhaps it meant that it was a vote for the candidate.

AFTER republics were absorbed into medieval empires, democracy still survived at lower levels. Most often, the emperor didn't meddle with administrative and social structures. For instance, during the Mughal period trade and rural affairs were still carried on by popular assemblies.

Even without the outward trappings of votes and ballot boxes, a system of collective politics grew in villages. This was the beginning of panchayats. A group of elders would sit under a tree, give political advice and dispense justice. Its influence on rural society survives to this day.



THE BRITISH separated revenue, judicial and legal affairs into different departments, and kept all power to themselves. Ordinary people had little connection with the government. Bureaucracy became important and village community-based assemblies lost their relevance.

IN 1919, the British created a bicameral legislature at the centre, i.e. a Parliament with two chambers:

- (1) Members to the Council of States or Upper House were elected by a privileged few — only 17,364 out of 2.4 million people
- (2) Members to the Central Legislative Assembly or the Lower House were elected by a larger group — 9,09,874 people

Before Independence India was divided into States, which were ruled by princes under the supremacy of the British Crown, and Provinces, which were directly ruled by the British. Like the Centre, the provinces also had two Houses: the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. Again, not everyone could elect members to these Houses — only about 15% of the population had that privilege. The right to vote depended on how much property people owned, how educated they were and which class or community they came from. There were voting restrictions in the princely states too. Cochin and Travancore were the first to let all adults vote. When the Constitution came into force, all adults in India got the right to vote.

The Constitutional Path

The Constitution of India came into effect on **January 26, 1950**. It was **drafted by the Constituent Assembly**, whose members were elected by the legislative bodies of the Provinces and States. All major communities were represented. This Assembly also functioned as the provisional Parliament after Independence.

It took three years to draw up this most vital document.

The Constitution contains a Preamble, 395 Articles and 10 Schedules.

Changes in the Constitution can be made in the following ways:

- ✓ Matters of detail like those in the Schedules can be amended by a simple majority of Parliament.
- ✓ Significant changes in Articles require two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament.
- ✓ More fundamental changes additionally require the acceptance of the State Legislatures.

More than 80 amendments have been passed in 50 years of rapid change.

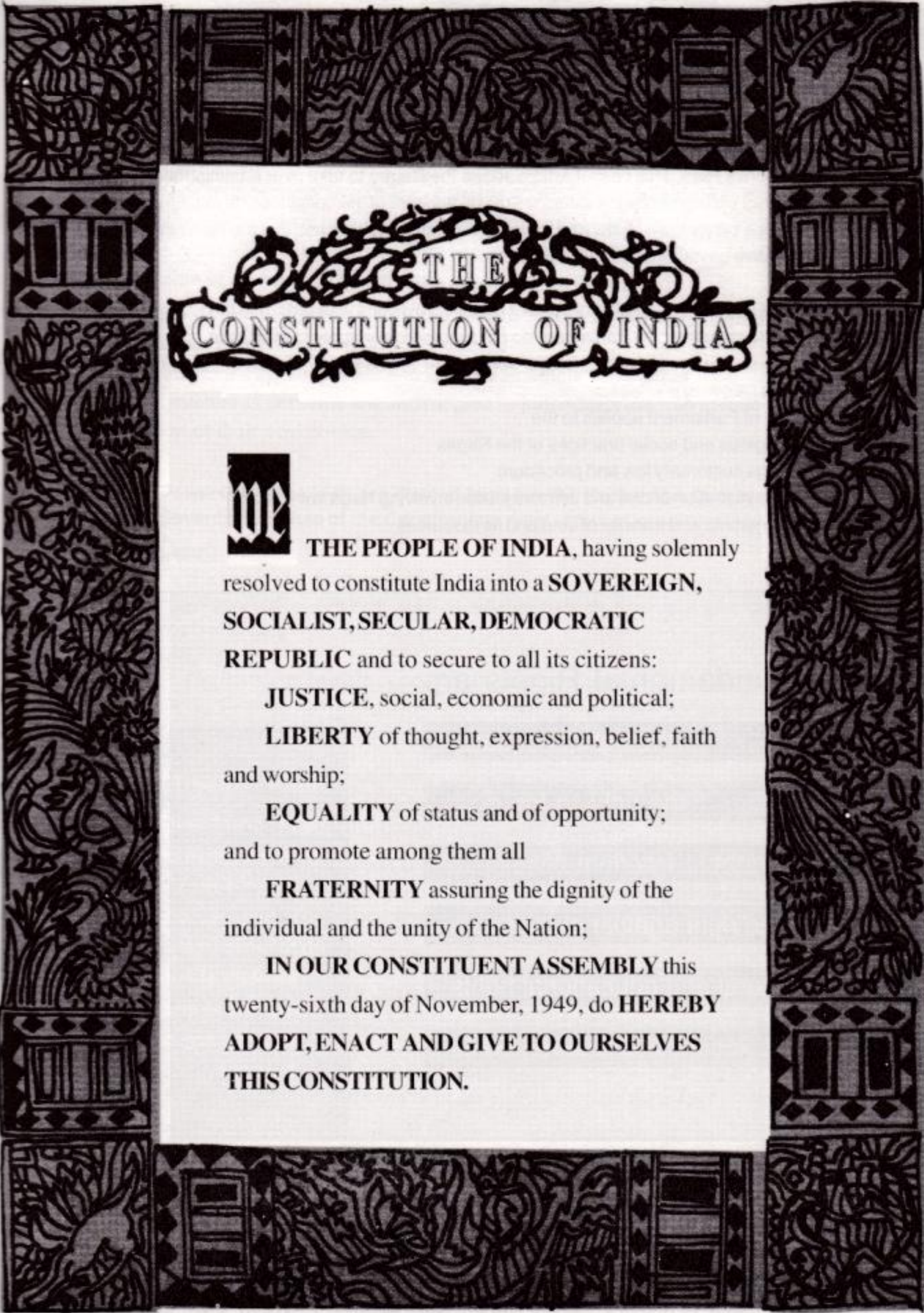
The word 'secular' was introduced in the Preamble by an amendment made in 1976, but it has been a dominant idea in the Constitution right from the start. It respects all cultures, languages and religions, and so keeps the country integrated in spite of its diversity. In this sense, the Constitution is like the Bible, or if you will, the Quran, Bhagwad Gita, Granth Sahib or Zend Avesta, of our democracy.

Article 15 of the Constitution prohibits the State from discriminating against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

Minority communities are given special rights to protect their identities, such as the right to have their own educational institutions. A community — religious or linguistic — which makes up less than 50% of the population is recognised as a Minority by the Constitution.

The Constitution has shown consideration to social sections which had been neglected for centuries — a positive discrimination to correct an imbalance. A certain percentage of seats in Parliament are reserved for those listed in a Schedule of the Constitution. They are referred to as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

However, a limited time-frame was given for these special benefits. If the results have not been achieved within this time, it reflects a failure in implementation. Helping weak and deprived segments of society by special care is a step towards equality, not away from it.



THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

WE

THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC** and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

POINTS TO PONDER

Article 356 of the Constitution permits the Central Government to dismiss a State Government and impose President's Rule. This crucial Article allows the Centre to take over administration in the States if the Governor recommends President's Rule on account of the constitutional machinery breaking down — e.g. if there is a breakdown of law and order, or the party in power has lost the faith of the House and an alternative government is not possible.

Article 370 of the Constitution makes certain provisions with regard to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. In effect, laws passed by Parliament do not automatically apply to that State.

There are special provisions for some other States too. For instance, under **Article 371-A**, Nagaland has the following privileges:

No Act of Parliament applies to the

- (i) religious and social practices of the Nagas
- (ii) Naga customary law and procedure
- (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving Naga law
- (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources

Our Fundamental Rights are

the right to equality

the right to freedom

the right to freedom of religion

the right against exploitation

cultural and educational rights

the right to constitutional remedies

Article 19: RIGHT TO FREEDOM

- (a) of speech and expression
- (b) to assemble peaceably and without arms
- (c) to form associations or unions
- (d) to move freely throughout the territory of India
- (e) to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business

There has been only one instance in the history of Independent India when the Fundamental Rights were suspended. This happened during the Emergency between 1975 and 1977. As a democratically elected government turned authoritarian in practice, people's rights were severely curtailed. Also, the Lok Sabha elections — due in 1976 — were postponed by a year.

FEDERALISM *IN* ACTION

THE CONSTITUTION describes India as a Union of States. India follows a federal system — States are given independent powers in many areas, but the Centre binds the nation together. To protect the oneness of India and at the same time encourage the various regional identities is a difficult task. Some of the ways in which India has achieved it are:

- single citizenship — a person belonging to one part of India has the same rights as a person from any other part
- recognition of 15 major Indian languages and English as official languages
- state neutrality in matters of personal law and religion — individuals are free to follow the culture and religion of their own choice

Powers to make laws are divided between the Centre and States, according to the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. A set of three Lists determines how it operates.

LIST I

The Union List. Matters in which Parliament has exclusive powers to make laws. It has 97 subjects of national interest, such as defence, finance, external affairs, atomic energy, railways, posts and telegraphs, insurance . . .

LIST II

The State List. Matters in which State Legislatures have exclusive powers to make laws. It has 66 subjects such as agriculture, land revenue, roads and bridges, public health and sanitation, police, prisons, land, water, fisheries . . .

LIST III

The Concurrent List. Matters in which Parliament and State Legislatures have simultaneous powers. It has 47 subjects such as criminal law, movement of prisoners, forests, prevention of cruelty to animals, population control and family planning . . .

In case of conflict between Union laws and State laws, the Union laws prevail. The power to make laws on any matter not listed in the Concurrent or State List rests with the Centre. So for the unity of the country the Centre is given an extra edge.

Most members use either Hindi or English in Parliament. Those who don't know the language in which a speech is being delivered can listen in to special translations — that's why you see them wearing earphones sometimes. The basic idea is to give space to regional and ethnic interests. In Zimbabwe, however, the language used in Parliament is always English. If someone uses the 'home' languages, Shona or Ndebele, the members of the house begin to scrape their feet . . . so the story goes! This is because they are against regionalism.

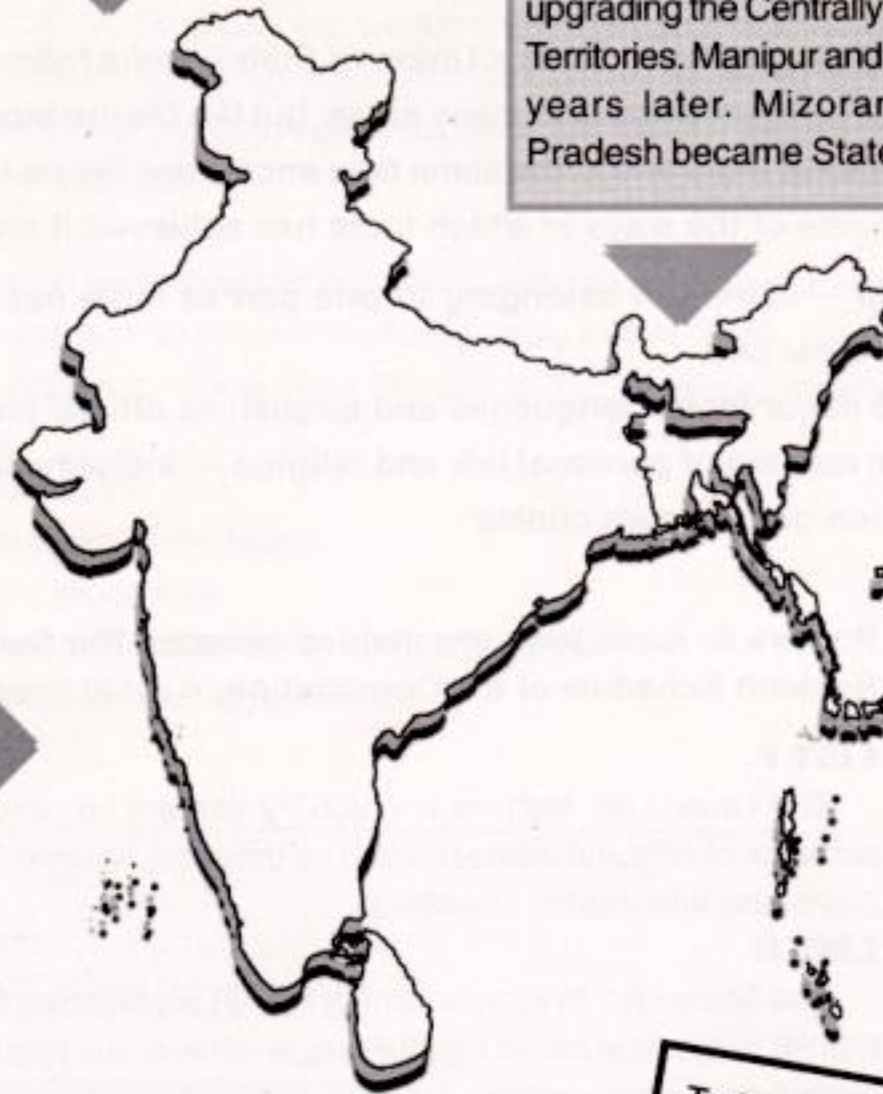


The hill State of Himachal Pradesh was created in 1971. Sikkim, which was a British protectorate during the colonial period, became the 22nd State of the Indian Union in 1975.

In the northeast, Assam was broken up and Meghalaya became a full-fledged State in 1970. Some States were created by upgrading the Centrally administered Union Territories. Manipur and Tripura followed two years later. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh became States in 1987.

Bombay State was bifurcated into Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1960 following agitations by the Gujaratis and Maharashtrians demanding their own linguistic States. The Akali Dal's demand for a State for Punjabi-speakers was granted in 1966 — the remaining Hindi-speaking areas became Haryana.

Goa, which was a part of the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu, became the 25th State of the Indian Union in May 1987.



Formation of States

The Indian National Congress had promised the reorganisation of States after Independence on the basis of language. However, no real steps were that direction. In 1952, Potti Sriramulu began a fast unto death demanding a State for Telugu-speakers. His martyrdom on the 58th day shook the Central leadership, which immediately gave in to the demand. It set up the States Reorganisation Commission, which recommended the formation of new States on the basis of language. Some old States were broken up to create new ones. West Bengal, Kerala, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madras and Mysore (later renamed Tamilnadu and Karnataka respectively) were predominantly unilingual — meaning, most people spoke the same language. However, a State like Jammu and Kashmir has three culturally distinct regions: the Buddhist-dominated Ladakh, the Muslim-dominated Kashmir Valley and the Hindu-dominated Jammu. And each of these regions has its own distinct languages and customs.

Today, the Union of India comprises
25 States
6 Union Territories and the
National Capital Territory of Delhi



Centre-State Relations

THE SYSTEM of government in the States closely follows the pattern of the Union Government. The Governor is the head of the State and answerable to the President. He or she acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister (CM). The leader of the majority party in the State Assembly becomes the CM. The Governor appoints the CM first, and then other Ministers on the advice of the CM. The Council of Ministers is responsible to the State Legislature, as the Union Cabinet is to Parliament. Union Territories have a Lieutenant-Governor in charge. Pondicherry and Delhi have elected governments as well.

THE DIVISION of powers between the Centre and the States has often been questioned, especially by regional parties. The States are at the mercy of the Centre, should it choose to impose President's Rule using Article 356. A provision intended to be used sparingly, has, however, been frequently misused by the Centre to get rid of State Governments belonging to other parties. The Article was used 8 times during the Nehru era. Between 1965 and 1987, it was used nearly 70 times.

Disturbances in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Assam have led to the postponement of elections off and on. Regular elections can be stopped only by a constitutional amendment and in consultation with the Election Commission. This is done to protect the democratic rights of the people.

In 1983, the Centre appointed a team headed by Justice R. S. Sarkaria, a former Judge of the Supreme Court, to review Centre-State relations. The Sarkaria Commission's report in 1988 laid down guidelines to check the misuse of authority by the Centre but did not favour any major changes in the Constitution.

THE LARGE States have large legislatures. The State Legislature may be unicameral, i.e. with only one House, or bicameral, with two Houses. Where there is only one House, it is known as the Vidhan Sabha or Legislative Assembly. Where there are two Houses, the Council of Ministers is responsible to the Legislative Assembly. The Upper House is known as the Vidhan Parishad or Legislative Council. Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh have bicameral legislatures.

THE CONSTITUTION prescribes a maximum strength of 500 members and a minimum strength of 60 for the Legislative Assembly. The strength of the Legislative Council cannot exceed one-third the strength of the Legislative Assembly. A member of the Legislative Assembly is known as MLA and a member of the Legislative Council is known as MLC.





Checks and Balances

The Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary are the three branches of government. Together they make a sprawling tree. Each branch has its own role and responsibilities, but each also has a say in how the other functions. The Executive is subordinate to the Legislature while the Judiciary is independent. The President appoints the Judiciary, but Parliament has the right to remove or impeach members of the Executive or the Judiciary. Although there has been an attempt to put in place a system of checks and balances, there are occasions when one branch overrides another.

THE Executive

PRESIDENT



TENURE Five years

FUNCTIONS

Head of State
Supreme commander of the Armed Forces
Appoints several top-level functionaries

The executive power of the Indian Union lies with the President who acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister (PM). The Supreme Court has laid down three situations when the President need not accept the PM's advice. These are:

- (1) Dismissal of government
- (2) Choice of PM and
- (3) Dissolution of Lok Sabha

The President appoints the PM, Council of Ministers, Chief Justice and Supreme Court judges, Attorney-General, Comptroller and Auditor-General, Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners.

The President is elected by an electoral college comprising members of both Houses of Parliament and of the Legislative Assemblies.

VICE PRESIDENT



TENURE Five years

FUNCTIONS

Chairman of the Rajya Sabha
The Vice President is elected by an electoral college comprising members of both Houses of Parliament.

PRIME MINISTER



TENURE

In theory, the PM holds office at the pleasure of the President. Actually, the PM can hold office as long as he or she commands the confidence of the Lok Sabha.

FUNCTIONS

Head of the Government
Chooses a Council of Ministers and distributes their portfolios
Keeps the President informed on policy matters

The PM is the head of the Government, and the leader of the party, coalition or formation which has a majority in the Lok Sabha. The PM recommends a Council of Ministers whom the President appoints. The Ministers are answerable to the Lok Sabha, which in turn represents the people.

The Council of Ministers comprises Cabinet Ministers, Ministers of State and Deputy Ministers. The PM distributes portfolios, or different departments, among the Cabinet Ministers and sometimes holds personal charge of some. The major ones include Home, Defence, External Affairs, Finance, Industry, Commerce, Communications, Information and Broadcasting, Railways, Civil Aviation, Surface Transport, Science and Technology, Environment, Steel and Mines, Petroleum, Water Resources and so on.

THE Legislature

The 2 Houses of Parliament — the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha — form a part of the Central Legislature which is the policy-making body.

PARLIAMENT

- ♦ has the power to pass laws, oversee administration, pass budgets; and discuss public grievances, development plans, international relations, policies and other national matters
- ♦ can impeach and remove from office important people like the President, Supreme Court and High Court judges, Election Commissioners and the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India
- ♦ has the power to increase the number of judges

The Lok Sabha or House of the People

- ♦ is a body of directly elected members. Each member represents a constituency — a specially demarcated geographical area in which all eligible voters choose one person from a set of candidates
- ♦ has 543 elected members and two nominated members of the Anglo-Indian community
- ♦ is more powerful than the Rajya Sabha because it is to this House that the Government is responsible
- ♦ alone has powers to vote funds for Government expenses
- ♦ is ordinarily elected for a period of five years

The Speaker is the presiding authority in the Lok Sabha or Assembly.

The Rajya Sabha or Council of States

- ♦ has indirectly elected members
- ♦ has up to 238 members who represent the States and the Union Territories; 12 are nominated by the President
- ♦ is never dissolved but about one-third of its members retire every two years. The maximum term for a member is six years.
- ♦ has no financial powers. However, its agreement is required for the passage of all laws, including those for the amendment of the Constitution.

THE Judiciary

The Judiciary is made up of the Supreme Court, the High Courts and the subordinate courts. As the highest authority, the Supreme Court has the power to :

- ♦ interpret the Constitution
- ♦ determine whether the laws passed by Parliament are consistent with the Constitution. (In 1973, it ruled that while Parliament can amend the Constitution, it cannot change its basic structure.)
- ♦ to settle disputes between the Centre and the States and also disputes between States
- ♦ to review High Court decisions – this is called 'appellate jurisdiction'
- ♦ to entertain petitions from citizens against any infringement of their fundamental rights (the High Courts too have this power)

CHIEF JUSTICE



TENURE until 65 years of age

APPOINTED BY The President

FUNCTIONS

Heads the judiciary

IMPEACHMENT is the procedure by which high-level officials are charged with serious misconduct. The process can be started in either House. If it begins in the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha has to approve it by a two-thirds majority of members present at that time — and the other way round if it starts in the Rajya Sabha. So far the impeachment procedure has been invoked only once. The action was against a judge of the Supreme Court. It failed for lack of a two-thirds majority.

Zero Hour

Time allotted in Parliament every day for miscellaneous business such as call attention notices, questions on official statements and adjournment motions.

Question Hour

A session in Parliament or Assembly usually begins with Question Hour. Members can ask questions on any aspect of administration. Each member is allowed a quota of five questions a day.

Supplementary Question

Question asked in Parliament based on the answer to the main question.

Filibuster

Parliamentary device of long-winded speeches, not necessarily relevant, to obstruct, delay or bargain over an issue under consideration for voting.

Cross the Floor

Join the opposite side in Parliament.

Sine Die

This Latin phrase is used when Parliament is adjourned indefinitely or without an appointed date for meeting again.

No-confidence Motion

A resolution moved to express lack of confidence in an elected functionary.

Vote of Confidence

A process by which the leader of the ruling party tests his or her strength in the House. Losing a vote of confidence implies a change in leadership or fresh elections.

Impeachment

Prosecution of a very high functionary by Parliament for alleged offences beyond the normal reach of law.

Franchise or Suffrage

The right to vote in political elections. The word suffragette was coined to describe a woman who fought for the right to vote through organised protest in 19th-century Britain.

Ballot Paper

The formal list of election candidates, along with their party symbols. The voter puts a mark against the name of the candidate of his or her choice.

Ballot Box

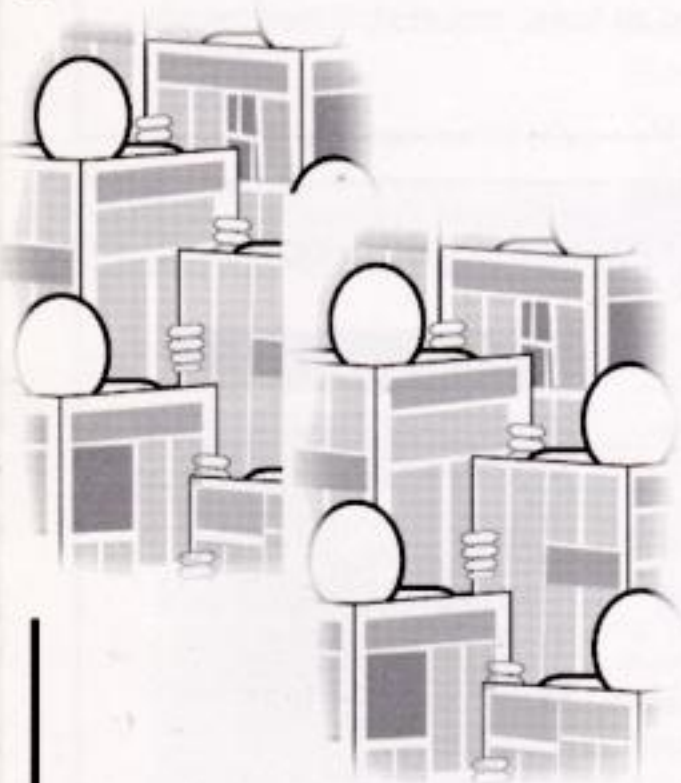
The box into which the ballot paper is put after voting.

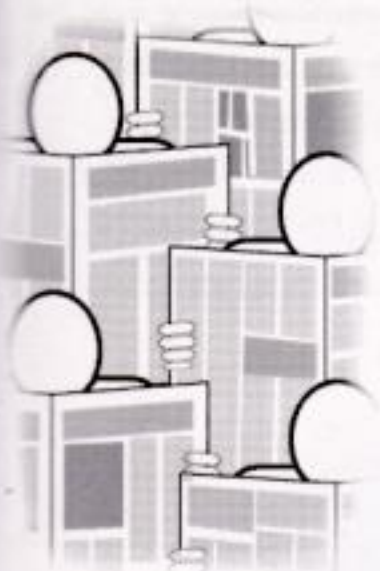
Mid-term Election

This happens when the Legislature is dissolved before its full term is completed.

By-election

Special election to fill a vacancy created by the death, resignation or disqualification of a Member of Parliament or State Legislature.



**Constituency**

A specified area from which a member is elected to the Lok Sabha or the Legislative Assembly.

Electorate

A collective term for all eligible voters.

Electoral College

A special body which elects the President and Vice President.

Plebiscite

Direct vote by electors, i.e. the people, on a public issue of importance.

Referendum

The process of referring a political question to the electorate for a direct decision.

Snap vote

A vote taken suddenly, without voters being told in advance.

Absolute Majority

When a party wins more than half the seats in Parliament or a State Legislature.

Hung Parliament

When no party has an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha.

Coalition Government

A government formed by two or more parties.

Minority Government

Rule by a single party that lacks a majority, but is supported from the outside by other parties.

President's Rule

In special circumstances in a State — such as serious breakdown of law and order, or if the ruling party loses support and falls — the Governor of the State takes charge of administration till Assembly elections are held. A Governor is an agent of the President, so the President rules indirectly.

Caretaker Government

A government that holds office after a government falls and until fresh elections are held.

Lame-duck Parliament

A House of Parliament, the term of which is about to expire.

Dark Horse

A fairly unknown person in a race, including a political one, who is not really expected to win — but just might.

Horse-trading

Backstage deals between parties to muster political support.

Gerrymander

Manipulating the borders of a constituency to give a political party or section undue advantage. The term was coined in the 1820s when the Governor of Massachusetts, Elbridge Gerry, drew a constituency on a map to help a particular candidate win an election. When someone remarked that it resembled a salamander, a type of amphibian, that came the reply: "Call it gerrymander".



The Role of the Presidency

Although the President is a titular head with limited political powers, the chief resident of Rashtrapati Bhavan has an array of responsibilities, mostly ceremonial. The Presidents of India have been persons of eminence and fairly representative of its diversity. In times of political crisis and change, presidential judgement and actions have great relevance.



Dr Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963) was the first President of the Republic of India. He was in office between 1950 and 1962, and was the only President to be re-elected for a second term. He served as Chairman of the Constituent Assembly. He was a devout Gandhian from Bihar.



Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was President between 1962 and 1967, and Vice-President between 1952 and 1962. A scholar of Indian philosophy, he taught at various Indian universities. Between 1935 and 1952, he was Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at the University of Oxford. He was also India's representative to the UNESCO and Ambassador to the Soviet Union.



Dr Zakir Hussain (1897-1969) was Vice-President before becoming President in 1967. He did not live to complete his term. A nationalist and an educationist from Hyderabad, he had been Vice-Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University. He was elected President of the World University Service and appointed India's Representative to the UNESCO.



Giani Zail Singh (1916-1995) was President between 1982 and 1987. A Congressman from Punjab, he was the Union Home Minister when Indira Gandhi asked him to contest the presidential election. He earned the wrath of the Sikh religious leadership following Operation Blue Star — when the Army entered the Golden Temple in Amritsar to flush out militants. In the later part of his tenure, there were frequent reports of friction between him and Rajiv Gandhi, who became Prime Minister following his mother's assassination.



Ramaswamy Venkataraman (born 1910) was President between 1987 and 1992. A Congressman, from Tamilnadu, he completed a four-year stint as Union Minister before becoming Vice President. His Presidency saw four Prime Ministers come and go. Frequent changes at the Centre forced him to use his discretionary powers more than any President before. In his autobiography, *My Presidential Years*, he compared the role of the President in a parliamentary democracy to "an emergency lamp, which came into operation when (political) power failed and became dormant when power was restored".

The political scene moved from a phase of consolidation right after Independence to one of instability and flux. Along with it, the President too has had to face additional responsibilities. The President is helped by advisers and constitutional experts in making informed decisions. Why are presidential decisions sometimes criticised? One reason is that the situations requiring intervention are usually delicate. Also, when Presidents have belonged in the past to a political party, some think they are biased — even if they aren't. It is a challenge for a President to be seen to be above all this. Finally, India is still growing as a democratic nation — and positive public debate on any issue is the strength of democracy.



Varahagiri Venkata Giri (1894-1980) was President between 1969 and 1974. Starting out as a trade unionist, he went on to become Labour Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet, Governor in several States and Vice President in 1967. He entered the presidential race as an independent against the Congress party's nominee, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. While the campaign was on, the Congress party split and Indira Gandhi and her supporters switched support to V. V. Giri.



Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed (1905-1977) was President between 1974 and 1977. A lawyer from Assam, he was a Congressman who had held ministerial positions in the State and Union Governments. He signed the Emergency proclamation of 1975, but died before Emergency was lifted.



Neelam Sanjiva Reddy (1913-1997) had missed the post in 1969 but became President as the Janata Party nominee in 1977. He had been Congress Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh from 1962 to 1964, and was a prominent member of the 'Syndicate' or the group that controlled the Congress through the 1960s.



Shankar Dayal Sharma (born 1918) was President between 1992 and 1997. A lawyer and Congressman from Madhya Pradesh, he had also been Union Minister and Governor at various times. His presidency saw the upheaval surrounding the Babri Masjid and its demolition. He referred this issue to the Supreme Court, which upheld the acquisition of the disputed land. A fractured verdict in the 1996 Lok Sabha election put the President in a tight spot. Following strict procedure, he invited the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the single largest party, to form the government — a decision criticised later, for it lasted only 13 days.



Kocheril Raman Narayanan (born 1921) became President in 1997. He was a popular choice as most political parties deemed it an honour to have an eminent candidate from the Scheduled Castes as President in the 50th year of Independence. Born in a family of modest means in a Kerala village, he distinguished himself as an educationist, diplomat and Congress Union Minister. In 1999, he had to handle tricky situations when the caretaker government — led by the Bharatiya Janata Party — took various decisions on vital policy matters.



THE PRIME MINISTERS' GALLERY



Jawaharlal Nehru
(1889-1964)

A writer-statesman of eminence, he belonged to an affluent Kashmiri family of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. He was the longest serving Prime Minister, from 1947 to 1964, and his chief task was to organise and give direction to a new nation. He was a strong believer in democracy and the importance of Parliament. He also supported socialism — India's planners followed the Soviet model of a centrally planned economy and heavy industrialisation. Nehru was one of the architects of the Non-Aligned Movement, a novel foreign policy, which allowed flexibility in dealings with the two superpowers of the time, the USA and the USSR. Towards the end of his long tenure, Nehru did not display the hope of his famous 'tryst with destiny' speech made on the night of Independence. He died a disappointed man on May 27, 1964, never quite recovering from the humiliation of 1962 when China overran vast tracts of land along the border with India.



Gulzarilal Nanda
(1898-1995)

He was twice interim Prime Minister, in 1964 and 1966. After a stint as Minister in the Bombay Government, he was elected to the Lok Sabha and joined Nehru's Cabinet in the early 1950s. As a senior member of the Congress party, he was called upon to fill the Prime Minister's post temporarily — on Nehru's death, and again when Lal Bahadur Shastri died suddenly.



Lal Bahadur Shastri
(1904-1966)

The son of a schoolteacher in Uttar Pradesh, Shastri was known for his simplicity and quiet strength. He was a devoted Gandhian and an active Congressman. He was a Minister in Nehru's Cabinet. After the latter's death he became PM. It was a daunting time, with

problems on the economic, political and foreign affairs fronts. India was not producing enough food for its people — so he emphasised rural development and laid the foundations for the Green Revolution. A man of the masses, his popular slogan 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' was a tribute to the soldier and farmer. In 1965, Pakistan sent infiltrators into the Rann of Kutch and Kashmir. India retaliated by opening up the Lahore front. The full-blown war between India and Pakistan was brought to an end by a UN mediated ceasefire. A peace treaty was negotiated through the mediation of the Soviet Union. Shastri and Pakistani President Ayub Khan signed the agreement in Tashkent on January 10, 1966. Shastri died suddenly that night.



Indira Gandhi
(1917-1984)

The only child of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister from 1966 to 1977, and again from 1980 to 1984. She had a charismatic personality which held the Congress party, Parliament

and the country in her sway for a long time. Socialistically inclined, she nationalised banks and general insurance, and abolished privy purses to erstwhile royalty. Spurred on by her populist slogan 'Garibi Hatao', the Congress party swept the 1971 general elections. Her finest hour came soon after as India defeated Pakistan to liberate Bangladesh (East Pakistan). Indira Gandhi gave a major thrust to the development of science and technology, particularly space research. In May 1974, India conducted an underground nuclear test at Pokhran in Rajasthan, enabling it to join the select club of nuclear nations. The imposition of Emergency rule in 1975 and her over-reliance on her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, were her big mistakes. After a crushing electoral defeat in 1977 she bounced back to power in 1980. Her tackling of the Punjab problem strengthened Sikh militancy. She sent the Army into the Golden Temple, the Sikh shrine in Amritsar, to flush out militants sheltered there. The action, Operation Blue Star, hurt Sikh sentiments — and finally led to her assassination by her own Sikh security guards on October 31, 1984.



Morarji Desai
(1896-1995)

In 1977, Morarji Desai headed the first non-Congress Government at the Centre formed by the Janata Party. He had been a freedom fighter and was a staunch Gandhian. He was a Cabinet Minister under Nehru and Indira Gandhi. He split with the latter in 1969. When he became Prime Minister in 1977, he set up the Shah Commission of inquiry to look into the excesses of Emergency, and cases were slapped on Indira Gandhi and her son, Sanjay. Infighting within the Government cost him his post in July 1979.



Charan Singh
(1902-1987)

A Jat leader from Uttar Pradesh, he was Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in Morarji Desai's Cabinet. He became the Prime Minister after Desai's resignation, but had to prove majority support in the Lok Sabha. Knowing that he did not have enough support, he shied away from a confidence vote. Instead he called for fresh elections which were held in 1980.



Rajiv Gandhi
(1944-1991)

Following Indira Gandhi's assassination, her elder son Rajiv Gandhi became the youngest Prime Minister of India at 40. Two months later, he led the Congress to a massive victory on a sympathy wave after the assassination. He was a pilot and initially a reluctant politician, but was persuaded by his mother to help her in politics after Sanjay Gandhi died suddenly. Rajiv Gandhi started as a popular leader at home and abroad with

his modern outlook. Relations with China thawed, he signed accords with leaders in Punjab and Assam to resolve long-standing conflicts, revamped the Congress party and took the first steps towards economic liberalisation. However, his lack of political experience began to show. His Government was tainted with allegations of serious corruption in arms deals with the Swedish firm, Bofors. His decision to send in the Indian Peace-Keeping Force to tackle the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka created more problems. The Congress lost the 1989 elections. He pulled down Chandra Shekhar's Government in 1990. He was in the throes of a vigorous re-election campaign when he was assassinated by a suicide bomber of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, on May 21, 1991.



Vishwanath Pratap Singh
(Born 1931)

After a brief stint as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, V. P. Singh was a Minister in Indira Gandhi's and Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinets. In the wake of the Bofors scandal, he resigned as Defence Minister to lead a campaign against corruption. He

played a major role in uniting the opposition to Rajiv Gandhi. In 1989 he headed a minority government of the National Front, supported from outside by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Left parties. The arrangement was not very stable to begin with. Further, his Government attracted controversy when it decided to implement the Mandal Commission Report. His advocacy of reservation in government jobs and university seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) provoked an outbreak of violent protests in north India. The BJP withdrew support to the National Front when its leader L. K. Advani was arrested while on a controversial rath yatra across the country. V. P. Singh bowed out after losing a vote of confidence in Parliament in 1990. Though out of active politics now, he remains a mentor to his followers.



Chandra Shekhar
(Born 1927).

Supported by the Congress party under Rajiv Gandhi, Chandra Shekhar formed another minority government from November 1990 to June 1991. Faced with a severe foreign exchange crisis, he authorised the Reserve

Someone from Allahabad, a town in Uttar Pradesh (UP), once said that his town was famous for two things: "Lal amrood (red guavas) and Prime Ministers". Well, the Nehru-Gandhi family traced its ancestry to Allahabad and Lal Bahadur Shastri started his political career there. UP has been home to other PMs — Charan Singh, V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar. Interestingly, as the Congress lost its dominant position at the Centre, UP lost its monopoly.



Voluminous speechus

the non-congress

experiment

The first real challenge to the Congress emerged in the 1977 elections — after two and a half years of the Emergency. The first non-Congress government was formed by the Janata Party, a coalition of those opposed to the Emergency. The parties were the Congress(O) led by Morarji Desai, the Bharatiya Lok Dal led by Charan Singh, the Jana Sangh led by Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Socialists led by George Fernandes. They were joined by a splinter group from the Congress led by Jagjivan Ram. Their spiritual guide was Jayaprakash Narayan — a Gandhian freedom fighter who had renounced politics for social service.

Launching a spirited campaign for the restoration of democracy and Fundamental Rights, the Janata Party polled 43% of the vote and won more than half the seats in the Lok Sabha. The Congress(I) was trounced in the large States of the north. The Janata Party Government with Morarji Desai as Prime Minister lifted Emergency laws, and restored press freedom and judicial rights. However, the Government was plagued by infighting between parties and personalities, and collapsed in July 1979.

coming

the second

Power again passed into non-Congress(I) hands when Vishwanath Pratap Singh, a Congress Union Minister, resigned in protest against corruption in Rajiv Gandhi's government in 1987. His Jan Morcha, a new front, attracted other dissatisfied Congressmen. The remnants of the Janata Party and two breakaway groups of the Lok Dal also joined in to create the Janata Dal. Along with regional parties like N. T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) of Tamilnadu, the National Front was born. It made electoral adjustments with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to make sure the Congress(I) lost, and formed a Government supported from outside by the BJP and the Left parties. V. P. Singh became the PM.

As with the Janata Party, this Government too was riven by personality clashes and controversies. There were protests against the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report. The BJP withdrew support when the Government ordered the arrest of its leader L. K. Advani, who was leading a rath yatra to gather support for a Ram temple in Ayodhya. V. P. Singh resigned after he lost the vote of confidence in Parliament in November 1990.

the third attempt

Under the banner of the United Front, a third attempt was made to create an alternative to the Congress(I) after the 1996 general election. The verdict of a hung parliament had made the task of government formation difficult. Its glory departed, the Janata Dal could not take the initiative on its own. However, intervention by V. P. Singh, who had retired from politics, and the active encouragement of the Communist parties paved the way for the formation of a United Front Government. It was led by the Janata Dal and supported from the outside by the Congress(I). But it soon ran into trouble when Congress(I) president Sitaram Kesri insisted on the replacement of the PM, H. D. Deve Gowda. The United Front survived by substituting him with I. K. Gujral, but fell quickly when the Congress(I) again withdrew support in 1997. Out of power, the Janata Party weakened. It split in the run-up to the 1999 elections, with one faction supporting the the BJP coalition.

A quick look at some events . . .

Independence,
Partition, First war
with Pakistan

India becomes
a republic

Panch Sheel
agreement between
India and China

China overruns
Indian territory

Second war
with Pakistan

Third war with Pakistan.
India supports the formation
of Bangladesh

Atomic device
exploded at Pokhran
in Rajasthan

1947

1950

1954

1962

1965

1971

1974

an alternative

from the right

One of the country's youngest parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been a major player since the mid-1990s. In its earlier avatar as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, it was part of the Janata experiment of 1977-79 — it changed its name after breaking away from the Janata Party. It barely registered a presence after the 1984 elections, winning just two Lok Sabha seats. But its opposition to the Congress remained strong. Ten years later, it again joined anti-Congress forces and provided outside support to the minority Government of V. P. Singh.

The BJP's strength grew steadily. Its support was greater in the north. In the 1990s, it was in power in several northern States. Its ideology has always been 'Hindutva'. It believed that Hindu culture and values should dominate in the country and people of other faiths would have to adjust to this. It has close links with Hindu right-wing forces known as the Sangh Parivar — the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and others. Some of these groups were responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. The BJP's association with them brought some political dividends. But it also turned a section of voters, particularly among the minorities, away from the party.

In the election of 1996, the BJP became the largest party in the 11th Lok Sabha. But it didn't have a majority and struggled to find partners to form a stable government. Most were wary about aligning with a 'Hindu' party. The party adopted a more moderate posture before the 1998 elections. Bolstered by a battery of allies this time, the BJP finally formed a coalition government headed by its popular leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee.

In April 1999, the BJP's biggest partner, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), left the coalition because of irreconcilable differences. Parliament was dissolved, and the Vajpayee Ministry continued as caretaker government. Preparing for fresh elections, the BJP-led coalition attracted more partners and formalised itself as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).



Horriblous manifestus

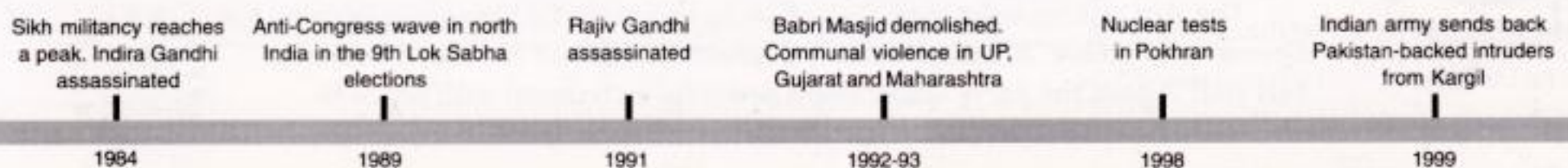
?

Is single party rule better than coalition rule?

Most people believe that single party rule is better because it provides a stable government. But coalitions can provide stable governments too. Coalition culture is strong in some States, notably Kerala, where two sets of coalitions have provided alternate governments for decades. In West Bengal, a coalition of like-minded parties has been in power for more than two decades.

Recent elections have shown that coalitions have become an inevitable part of the national political scene. Major and minor parties have no choice but to evolve a disciplined approach to coalition politics. Why have things changed?

?



A POLITICAL EVOLUTION

THE PARTY SYSTEM in India is rather unique. Unlike in the West, where most countries have two or three parties, India has nurtured many. When India became free, there were three main parties — the gigantic Indian National Congress, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of India. By the time we had our first elections in 1951-52, there were at least 50 parties.



The Congress dominated politics for about three decades after Independence. However the absence of a single, strong opposition party did not mean there were no voices of protest in Parliament and outside. But until 1970, there was even no formal Leader of the Opposition — no party had the 10% strength in the Lok Sabha to qualify for it. Only after the Congress split in 1969, Dr Ram Subagh Singh of the Congress(O) became the first such leader. When the Janata Party came to power at the Centre in 1977, the Leader of the Opposition was elevated to the rank of Cabinet Minister — Y. B. Chavan of the Congress(I) was the first to be given this status.

the longest innings

It seems ironic today that Mahatma Gandhi had once suggested that the Indian National Congress be disbanded after Independence. He wanted the Congress to remain active as a social service organisation. But the party followed a different course and dominated the political scene for many years.

Today India has the largest number of political parties in the world — roughly more than 600. For a long time there were no laws about how parties could be formed or how they should function. Many parties come to life just before an election. They only swell the number of candidates, cloud issues and confuse people.

A few political parties have an all-India platform. Most parties function at the State level. National parties are usually committed to some ideology — moderate, left-wing or right-wing. They have a better network all over the country. **State parties usually revolve around a local leader** with some mass support, and are concerned with regional questions.



THE ANTI-DEFECTION ACT

The Anti-Defection Act, a Constitutional amendment, was passed in 1985 to stop the flood of floor-crossers in Parliament, popularly known as the 'Aya Rams, Gaya Rams' — those who switch parties with ease and speed.



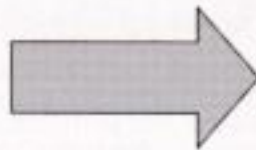
Defection had become so frequent that it began to undermine the party system — members would change parties due to inducements rather than a genuine shift in political beliefs. There was nothing to stop them. The Act says that if members of the Lok Sabha or Assemblies switch parties after elections, they lose their seats. They can also be disqualified if they don't go along with the party while voting on issues. Only if one-third or more of the party breaks away is it considered a 'split' — the breakaway faction is then allowed to start its own party or join another, without members giving up their Parliament or Assembly seats. The Act also says that only the Speaker can disqualify a member — no court has jurisdiction over the matter.

The Act was brought in by Rajiv Gandhi and played a big role in keeping his Government stable. Although initially everyone welcomed the law, it was later felt that it gave the party leadership a powerful instrument with which to smother internal democracy.



The Election Commission revises the list of recognised parties after every general election depending on how many votes they won. The criterion for recognition is that a party should secure at least 4% of the total votes cast in a State. If it gets recognition in four or more States, it is given the status of a national party. If not, it remains a State party.

After the 1998 general elections, the Election Commission has recognised these as **national parties**.



Bahujan Samaj Party
Bharatiya Janata Party
Communist Party of India
Communist Party of India (Marxist)
Indian National Congress
Janata Dal
Samata Party

SOME IMPORTANT REGIONAL PARTIES

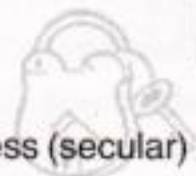
WEST

Republican Party of India
 Shiv Sena
 Maharashtra Gomantak Party
 United Goans Democratic Party
 Rashtriya Janata Party



NORTH

All India Indira Congress (secular)
 Haryana Vikas Party
 National Conference
 Rashtriya Janata Dal
 Shiromani Akali Dal
 Samajwadi Party



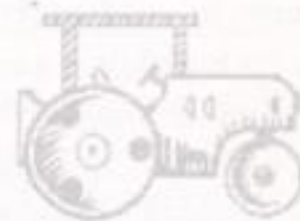
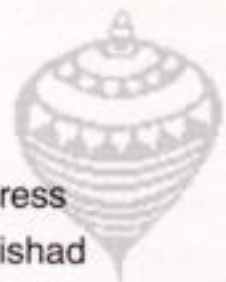
SOUTH

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
 All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
 Janata Party
 Kerala Congress (J)
 Kerala Congress(M)
 Indian Union Muslim League
 Pattali Makkal Katchi
 Revolutionary Socialist Party
 Tamil Maanila Congress
 Telugu Desam Party
 NTR Telugu Desam Party (Lakshmi Parvathi)
 Lok Shakti



EAST

Arunachal Congress
 Asom Gana Parishad
 Autonomous State Demand Committee
 Mizo National Front
 Manipur People's Party
 All India Forward Bloc
 Hill State People's Democratic Party
 Jharkhand Mukti Morcha
 Sikkim Democratic Front
 Biju Janata Dal
 Trinamul Congress



The Congress was very strong in Assam for several decades. The party's handling of the student unrest in Assam and insurgent groups eventually affected its popularity. The Asom Gana Parishad, run by student leaders, posed a challenge in the State. Regional concerns led to new political formations too. By the late 1990s, a range of national and regional parties competed for the 25 Lok Sabha seats from the northeastern States.

The Nationalist Congress Party was formed in June 1999. Its leaders are Sharad Pawar, P. A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar who were expelled from the Congress(I) because they opposed Sonia Gandhi being projected as the party's prime ministerial candidate.

VISIONARIES OF OUR TIME



Mahatma Gandhi

For the people of India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has been both Bapu, a father-figure, and a patron saint of politics. The self-sacrificing spirit of satyagraha which dominated his politics, has however made a sad exit from public life.

Gandhiji was influenced by the words and actions of Henry David Thoreau, the American writer and thinker who first used the term 'civil disobedience' in a speech in 1849. Gandhiji was also inspired by John Ruskin's ideal of manual labour as expressed in his book, *Unto This Last*. The lessons that he drew from the book were: the good of the individual is contained in the good of all; lawyers have as much value as barbers — all have the same right to earn a livelihood from their work; a life of labour — the life of the tiller of the soil and the handicraftsman — is the life worth living.

Mahatma Gandhi changed the character of the Indian National Congress from an urban middle class party into a socio-political movement that spread into the heart of rural India. He captured the popular imagination with his unique approach to get Independence through ahimsa or non-violence. Freedom won, he chose not to accept any public office. Instead, he walked through the riot-torn areas of Bihar and Bengal, trying to stop communal killings. When he returned to Delhi, he preached non-violence every day until his assassination by a Hindu fanatic on January 30, 1948. Jawaharlal Nehru voiced the sentiment of ordinary Indians when he said in his radio broadcast: "The light has gone out of our lives. And there is darkness everywhere."

B. R. Ambedkar

As Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and as Law Minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar drafted Constitutional provisions and piloted legislation that promised social equality for all citizens. Considered an 'untouchable' by birth, he was fiercely critical of the caste system. He shunned Hinduism to become a Buddhist at a mass meeting in 1956, along with thousands of his followers. Ambedkar founded the Republican Party of India which split subsequently but is still active in Maharashtra. He has been adopted by the depressed classes as a symbol of protest.



Jayaprakash Narayan

Popularly known as Lok Nayak or JP, Jayaprakash Narayan was a freedom fighter who renounced politics soon after Independence. He joined Vinoba Bhave in the bhoodan and sarvodaya movements — voluntary land donations and service to all. In 1974 he plunged into a campaign against corruption in public life which received enormous mass support especially from the youth, including students. Indira Gandhi sought to put down the movement using force. JP was imprisoned when she declared Emergency, and he became a symbol of resistance to authoritarianism.

OTHER MAJOR PLAYERS



EMS Namboodiripad As the first Communist Chief Minister of Kerala, EMS initiated land reforms, introduced curbs on private school managements and encouraged investment in industries. This provoked landlords and Christian missions which owned many schools and colleges, and they launched a mass agitation. The Central Government used the law and order situation as a pretext and dismissed the Namboodiripad Ministry. President's Rule was imposed in Kerala in 1959. After the split in the CPI, EMS went with the CPI(M). As its leader, he was again Chief Minister of Kerala from 1967 to 1969. He was a member of the party Politburo, general secretary of the CPI(M) for several years, a leading Marxist theoretician and prolific writer.

Three factions of the Kerala Congress represent the interests of the large Christian community in the State. One faction is a part of the Left-led coalition.

THE LEFT MOVEMENT

The Communist Party of India (CPI) founded in 1925 sprang from revolutionary ideals. In free India's first Parliament, it was the main Opposition party. There were ideological disputes within the party over cooperating with Nehru's government. It supported Nehru's foreign policy, but opposed his economic policy.

Communism in India has a different flavour from that in China or in the former Soviet Union. Here, we have democratically elected Communist governments. It all began in Kerala in 1957 under the chief ministership of E. M. S. Namboodiripad.

The ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and China caused a split in the CPI in 1964 — 32 members of the CPI national committee left to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which eventually became the dominant Left party.

Although the Left parties — the CPI(M), the CPI, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the All India Forward Bloc — are separate entities, they are all part of a Left Front which works together on policy issues and electoral

arrangements. The Left Front extended support to the National Front Government in 1989 and the United Front Government in 1996 and 1998.

The Left movement has encouraged land reforms and the growth of trade unions particularly in the States where it has been in power, namely West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala. A coalition led by the CPI(M) has been in power continuously in West Bengal since 1977. Some extreme Leftist organisations, such as the CPI (Marxist-Leninist) and the Peoples' War Group, remain outside the political mainstream.

Jyoti Basu He is the longest-serving Chief Minister in the country. He took charge of West Bengal when the CPI(M)-led Left Front won the Assembly elections in 1977. He brought stability to a State racked by industrial unrest and land disputes, giving attention to rural development and education.



The Muslim League ceased to play a role on the national stage soon after India gained Independence. Revived later, it is today recognised as a State party in Kerala where it has participated in coalition governments.

SWATANTARA PARTY

This was founded in 1959 by freedom fighter and former Congressman C. Rajagopalachari and a group of industrialists, wealthy farmers and former princes. The Swatantara Party was a conservative but secular opposition to the ruling Congress and its socialistic platform. It opposed the economic policies of the Congress, especially State planning and management of heavy industry. It also advocated a more pro-American foreign policy in place of Non-alignment. At one stage, the Swatantara Party appeared set to offer a workable alternative to the Congress. But it suffered a massive defeat in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 1971-72 and disappeared by the mid-1970s.



The Shiv Sena was founded by cartoonist-journalist Bal Thackeray in 1966 on the platform of 'Maharashtra for Maharashtrians'. It led violent attacks on migrants in Mumbai. Later, Muslims became the target. It used symbols like that of Shivaji, the 17th-century Maratha warrior-king, to rouse people and give itself political power.

SHIV SENA

Its appeal was initially among the lower middle income groups. Strong-arm tactics — such as willingness to evict tenants and squatters and demands for 'protection money' — brought the Shiv Sena more support, as other sections of society started seeking its patronage. A poor showing in the 1991 Assembly elections in Maharashtra did not deter the Shiv Sena. It emerged as the largest party in 1996 and formed a coalition government with the BJP in Maharashtra. In 1999 the Supreme Court banned Thackeray from participating in elections for the next six years because of his inflammatory public speeches, which were considered a dangerous influence on the people.

Two colourful backward caste leaders, Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh and Laloo Prasad Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar have changed politics in the two crucial States

YADAV BACKLASH

of the Hindi heartland. The Mandal Commission Report had united the Backward Classes (BCs) firmly behind the Janata Dal. The two Yadav leaders cashed in on this and broke away to start their own parties with the support base of the BCs. Their power is confined mainly to their own States, though the SP has some influence in Maharashtra as well. Their climb to power and persistence reflects the coming of age of a new breed of politicians — a group that had little access to political power in the early years of Independence. They herald the changing political and social patterns of northern India.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), formed in 1984, is by and large a Dalit grouping both in membership and support. The party's founder, Kanshi Ram, left the civil services to enter politics. He lost his first election, but the BSP gained ground over a short time. In 1989, it won two Lok Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh. It also won Assembly seats in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. In the early 1990s, as caste-based and religion-driven conflicts intensified in UP, the BSP teamed up with the Samajwadi Party (SP),

DALIT RESURGENCE

which had a support base among Backward Classes and Muslims. Together they defeated the BJP in 1993. Sharing power in UP was not comfortable for either, and before long the SP and BSP leaders — Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati — fell out with each other. The BJP stepped in to support the BSP. But this arrangement too was short-lived. However, the brief taste of political power gave Dalits the impetus to mobilise themselves further. The BSP is estimated to have a vote share of 20% in UP.

E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, popularly known as Periyar, was the grand patriarch of the Dravidian movement. He walked out of the Congress party when his resolution on social justice and class equality was not discussed at the party's Kanchipuram conference in 1926.

THE DRAVIDIAN MOVEMENT

He spent the next two decades developing the 'self-respect movement' — Swayam Mariyada Iyakkam — to fight class distinctions, subjugation of women, social injustice, bonded labour and superstitions. He wanted a separate and independent State where the Dravidian race, culture and languages would be supreme. His party was the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and its symbol a black flag with a red centre, depicting a subjugated people. The Tamil past was glorified. Images of Hindu deities were destroyed, the Ramayana denounced and Sanskrit words removed from the Tamil language — because they all had Aryan links. In the 1950s, feelings against northern domination and imposition of Hindi peaked. This was heightened by general opposition to the Congress Government of C. Rajagopalachari in Tamilnadu.

The movement however did not spread to other southern States. The DK's influence declined when C. N. Annadurai and others left the party to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in 1949. The DMK continued the demands for more autonomy from the Centre — its stand softened after it came to power in Tamil Nadu. In 1969 the party split when the matinee idol of Tamil cinema, M. G. Ramachandran (MGR), started the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). It set off a classic cinema-style rivalry between him and M. Karunanidhi of the DMK. After MGR's death his protegee, another film star J. Jayalalitha, took on the mantle of the AIADMK and carried on the rivalry with the DMK.



C.N. Annadurai, popularly known as Anna or 'elder brother', became the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Tamilnadu in 1967. Anna left a lasting impact on Dravidian politics, which has dominated the political scene in the State for decades.



M.G. Ramachandran For his fans, MGR was as much a hero off-screen as he was on celluloid. The film star became Chief Minister in 1977 — five years after he formed the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. He generated a level of mass adulation, especially in rural Tamilnadu, that few politicians have enjoyed. He launched several populist schemes. The one that had maximum impact was the mid-day meal scheme in government schools. For a decade, MGR ruled supreme in Tamilnadu politics. Even his failing health did not dampen the people's enthusiasm for him. Some of his die-hard followers immolated themselves when he died in 1987.

Riding on the crest of Telugu pride, the **TELUGU DESAM PARTY (TDP)** had a meteoric growth. Although it is essentially a State-level party, its founder N. T. Rama Rao played a significant role in the formation of the National Front. The TDP split after NTR's death. The faction led by his son-in-law N. Chandrababu Naidu emerged stronger.

N.T. Rama Rao NTR, who founded the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in 1982, was another celluloid hero turned politician. He changed the face of politics in Andhra Pradesh. The fledgling TDP was swept into power in the Assembly elections in 1983 and NTR became Chief Minister. Among his populist measures was the offer of rice at Rs 2 a kg for the poor. In his last years, his family members revolted against the growing clout of his second wife, Lakshmi Parvathi. He was politically isolated but loved by his people.



A militant band of Sikh volunteers came together in 1920 to liberate gurdwaras from the control of corrupt priests. They were known as the Akalis and played an important part in making Sikh farmers politically aware. In the 1937 elections in Punjab they contested as the Akali Dal. Their bid for a separate Sikh country in the pre-Partition negotiations had failed. They then campaigned for a State with Punjabi as the official language. This was achieved in 1966. The Akalis' demand for greater autonomy for Punjab — voiced in a resolution adopted at Anandpur Sahib in 1973 and therefore called the Anandpur Sahib Resolution — was seen as secessionist.

AKALI DAL

Even though the Akali Dal commands wide support among the Sikh peasantry, the party has been riddled with divisions. Through the 1980s, its major factions were either involved with, or at least soft on, terrorism. As normalcy returned to the State, the factions tried to reunite. The task was by no means easy. Only one Akali Dal faction contested the February 1992 elections and it lost. The Shiromani Akali Dal led by Parkash Singh Badal won the Assembly elections in 1996. As an ally of the BJP, it performed well in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.



Pratap Singh Kairon Congress Chief Minister of Punjab from 1956 to 1964, Pratap Singh Kairon was an able administrator who did a great deal for his State's development. He encouraged the setting up of the modern capital-city of Chandigarh, the agricultural university in Ludhiana, Sainik schools in Kapurthala and Kunjapura, and a network of canals and roads. His zeal for change sometimes made it seem as if he rode roughshod over the norms of the day. His secular outlook attracted the best minds of all communities to his endeavours and helped him contain the might of the Akalis.



K. Kamaraj Kamaraj was Chief Minister of Tamilnadu for nine years from 1954. In 1964, he became president of the Indian National Congress, a post he occupied for four years. He authored the famous 'Kamaraj Plan' for easing out powerful people from government by offering them party posts. During his term as party president, he arranged two smooth transitions of power after the deaths of Nehru and Shastri — for which he came to be known as 'kingmaker'.



Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Called Sher-e-Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah dominated the post-Independence politics of Jammu and Kashmir. He gave shape to the National Conference, which was formed in 1939 to represent Kashmiris who challenged the rule of the Dogra Maharaja. He organised popular resistance in Kashmir against Pathan invaders from Pakistan in 1947 and mobilised support for Kashmir's accession to India. Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in 1948, he was also a member of the Constituent Assembly. Under him, in 1952, Kashmir formally became part of India, with a special status under Article 370 of the Constitution. In August 1953, he was arrested on charges — never proved — of plotting with a foreign power to create an independent Kashmir. He was imprisoned off and on until 1972. His relationship with the Central Government in Delhi was always tense, but his command over Kashmir could never be ignored. In 1975, he became Chief Minister again and provided Kashmir a stable Government until he died in 1982. His son, Farooq Abdullah, then took charge of the National Conference and was Chief Minister. Grandson Omar Abdullah became a member of the Lok Sabha in 1998.

PULLS & PRESSURES

Running a democratic government can be quite a challenge. And in a country where diversity is a way of life, pulls and pressures have become a way of life too. In the early years of our democracy, big business, trade unions and peasants' organisations were some influential groups. In recent years, numerous caste-based and communal groups have also mobilised themselves to stake a claim to power. This shows that identities have become more important than issues.

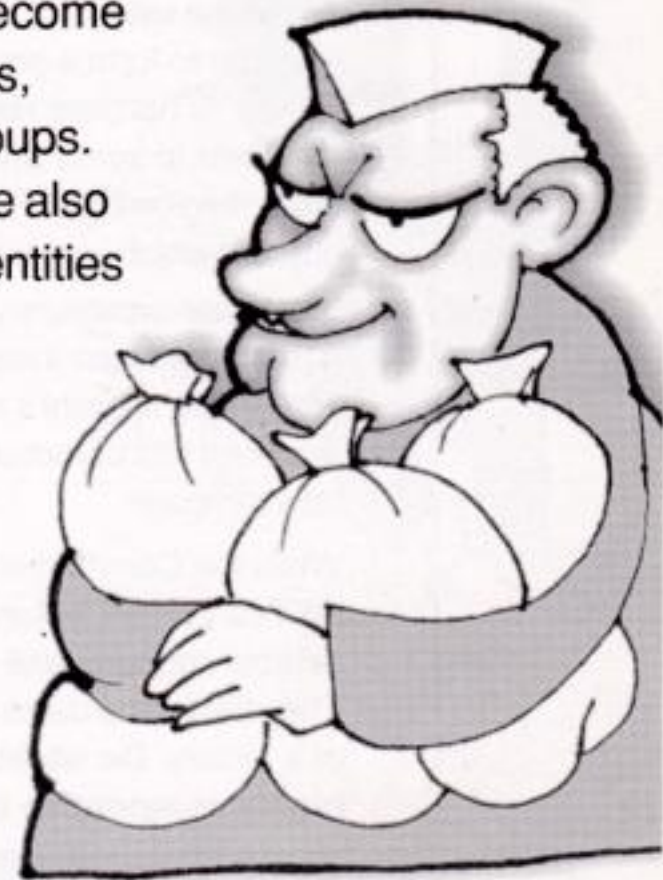
The profession of politics in India has attracted far too many people who are unprincipled, inefficient, corrupt, and even criminal. In such a climate, the honest politician cuts a pitiful figure. The democratic process has attracted people who can win elections rather than those who stand on principles. Have voters become less discerning?



What are the major challenges facing Indian democracy today? Some would put **corruption** on top of the heap. Others would say **communalism**. In some regions, **terrorism** is a bigger issue. In other places, it is **feudalism**.

Assam, Nagaland, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir have been the hotbed of insurgent activity. What started as campaigns for self-determination, grew into virulent terrorist movements. Restoring functional democracy through elections and by sharing power with some groups have kept militancy in check in some areas.

Muscle power goes hand in hand with electoral politics as practised today. Booth-capturing, stuffing ballot boxes and terrorising voters are routine in some pockets. These are signs of a sick democracy. Desperate politicians turn to mafia elements to ensure a victory for themselves. If laws are not strict enough to keep candidates with criminal records away from the fray, if they can contest from jails and become Ministers too, how can the people be expected to have faith in the system?



Corruptus moneybaggus
circa 1970-99 A.D.

Any form of corruption, whether by the political class or the bureaucracy, is a betrayal of the people. It is a malaise that spreads easily through the system. As corruption increases, it is reflected in the living standards of Ministers, MPs, MLAs and many others. This creates a social distancing between the people and their leaders, between the masses and those who are supposed to represent them.



Bhootus capturus

Communalism

Dividing communities by exploiting religious sentiments for political reasons is a dangerous trend. In the first four decades after Independence, Hindu nationalist parties never got more than 10% of the national vote. The rath yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya in 1990 by BJP leader L. K. Advani attempted to consolidate the Hindu vote. It certainly led to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a mosque at Ayodhya, in December 1992 and communal riots which spread like wildfire in some States. By the 1996 election, the BJP more than doubled its vote share, registering a spectacular rise in the west and north. However, it also learnt that extremist politics alone would not give it the strength to form a government on its own. Since then, in deference to electoral politics, the party has diluted its hardline Hindutva policy. But it hasn't been able to control violent acts by extremist elements in some States. Hindus constitute 83% of the population, but huge numbers represent other religions too. Radical Islamic parties also tried to create a reign of terror in the south, an attempt which was curtailed.

Most inter-community clashes are directly fomented by politicians. But the rioters and their instigators roam free. This was true of the anti-Sikh riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination in Delhi instigated by Congress politicians and the 1993 communal riots in Mumbai when Shiv Sena activists went on a rampage.

While the Constitution talks of keeping religion separate from the state, political parties behave differently. They use various methods to mobilise a reliable support base or "vote bank" based on religious or caste identities. They field candidates of a particular community if it will enhance their chance of a victory. **Do we blame the political parties or the compulsions of a highly competitive electoral system?**



India's political democracy, critics say, has more to do with power than performance. The quality of democracy depends on the quality of its leadership. To get elected, all a leader needs is a political base, not vision. The very idea of democracy is defeated if it throws up leaders who are driven only by ambitions for power and narrow loyalties.

Regionalism



Regional parties occupied 123 seats in the 12th Lok Sabha. They enjoyed 24% of the popular vote among themselves. Political analysts say that this added a new dimension to the concept of federalism in the Indian context. They were representatives from nearly 40 parties. Nearly half of them were part of the BJP-led coalition Government. This created a peculiar situation — small parties would dictate terms to a large party. It certainly showed the rise of regional power and its growing influence on the Centre. Deserted by the AIADMK, the BJP struck an alliance with AIADMK's rival, the DMK, in the run-up to the 1999 elections. Such alliances suit the regional ally too. They have greater bargaining power.

The rise of regional parties is often attributed to the failure of the national parties, especially the Congress, to fulfil regional aspirations. Generally there was too much concentration of power. Sometimes State-level leaders were appointed by the party's central leadership.

However, regional parties are here to stay. Without their support, the BJP could not have provided a non-Congress alternative at the Centre in 1998. It could not have expanded its influence beyond the Hindi heartland and established a presence in several States without alliances with regional parties.

On a Different Track

The Indian economy is moving along a new track. In 1991, the Congress introduced a policy of economic liberalisation which was continued by the non-Congress governments that followed at the Centre. Most parties now accept that the process of economic reforms is irreversible.

Basically, liberalisation means allowing the private sector, domestic or foreign, greater participation in the economy. Multinational corporations are brought in to attract foreign capital. By and by, market forces are allowed greater momentum. While reforms are made in the belief that they will make Indian enterprises more competitive and improve their efficiency and performance, it also makes the government resort to drastic measures that could have a tremendous impact on society. The most pertinent question about liberalisation is whether these changes will help the poor. Economic change must reach the ordinary Indian. Liberalisation should not revolve around foreign cars and fast food chains, it must translate into jobs for the unemployed and food for the hungry.



A question often heard during the mid-1970s was: What was the point of democracy if it couldn't adequately feed, clothe and shelter Indians? Under the federal structure, crucial powers related to education and land reforms lie with the States. Yet how many State Governments have fulfilled their responsibilities in these areas?



THE BUREAUCRACY

A well-oiled bureaucratic machine can make the life of the average person smoother. Bureaucrats or civil servants function as the delivery system for development activity. But to deliver the goods, they must be allowed to function without fear or favour. There has been a leap in the size and power of the bureaucracy over the decades. In fact, the bureaucracy became unstoppable in so many ways. It made more and more rules. Nothing could get done without licenses. In a license raj, regulations became more important than economic enterprise and production. The more rules are made the more they get broken. But a dynamic bureaucrat can still make a difference. By devising innovative programmes for literacy, public health, water management . . .



do Women count?

A TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY is that women always matter as voters. Yet, do women make independent and informed choices? Female literacy is still low — it is quite likely that elder males in the family influence their choice. Even when women act independently, their judgement is often coloured by emotion. The charismatic Indira Gandhi, the young and handsome Rajiv Gandhi, and the adored Tamil matinee idol MGR were some lucky ones to benefit from a regular following among women voters. When women have responded overwhelmingly, it has resulted in landslide victories.

in 50 years . . .

- ▄ The average national turnout of female voters in Lok Sabha elections has never exceeded 56%
- ▄ The number of women members in the Lok Sabha has ranged from 19 to 44
- ▄ The number of women members in the Rajya Sabha has ranged from 14 to 29
- ▄ The percentage of women ministers in the Union Cabinet has ranged from 4 to 13. Their number was as low as 2 out of 36 in 1996

an unequal game

Women constitute half the population — logically, they should be playing an equal role with men in key spheres of public life. But politics is not about logic. The country has had nine Presidents, all men; 11 Prime Ministers, only one of them a woman. Out of 200-odd Chief Ministers, about a dozen were women. While women have recorded a comparatively better presence as Union Ministers, Parliamentarians, Governors, State Ministers and Legislators, their numbers in each category average at less than 10% in five decades. To make matters worse, very few women in power have risen on their own. Most have been daughters, wives or proteges of politicians — the 'beti-biwi-bahu brigade'.

1st woman Prime Minister of India **INDIRA GANDHI**, 1966

woman Governor **SAROJINI NAIDU**, 1947

woman Cabinet Minister **RAJKUMARI AMRIT KAUR** — Union Minister of Health, 1947

woman Chief Minister **SUCHETA KRIPALANI** — Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, 1963-67

women mayors **TARA CHERIAN** — Mayor of Madras, 1957

ARUNA ASAF ALI — Mayor of Delhi, 1958

woman Supreme Court Judge **M FATHIMA BEEVI**, 1989

woman Chief Justice **LEILA SETH** — Himachal Pradesh High Court, 1991.

where is she?

What prevents women from participating in politics? Why do they need special consideration? ■ lack of education, particularly in the rural areas ■ social and family barriers and preoccupation with household duties ■ a male-dominated political structure

political parties to blame

In 1952, 43 women contested for the Lok Sabha and 14 were elected. In 1996, there were 599 women candidates — only 40 were elected and as many as 518 lost their deposit. More than 70% of the women were independents who did not have organisational support. So clearly, the blame lies with political parties. Unless parties are willing to field more women candidates and provide them with support, the situation cannot improve.

reservation for women

Reservation for women in Parliament and the State Assemblies is one way of ensuring their greater participation in politics. Various women's groups — such as the All India Democratic Women's Association and the National Women's Commission — came together to campaign for 33% reservation for women. All parties say they agree with the idea, but seem to disagree on the exact provisions. The Women's Reservation Bill could not be tabled in Parliament because some parties wanted special concessions for women from Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and tribal communities.

In some rural areas, women are kept away from panchayat meetings, their signatures are collected at their homes and the meetings are conducted through dummy candidates.

at the grassroots

Let's take a closer look at reservations. One-third of the seats are reserved for women in panchayats and all elected offices of local bodies whether rural or urban. To give women an opportunity to emerge as leaders and decision-makers, several thousand chairpersons' posts are reserved for them at the village, block and district levels.

The first all-woman panchayat took office at Pigtora village of Badnawar tehsil in Andhra Pradesh as early as July 21, 1989. There are 6,32,248 women in gram panchayats, 43,046 in panchayat samitis and 3,955 in zilla parishads, according to the data for 1991-97 published by the Department of Women and Child Development. Women have made some impact in municipal elections. In 1997, there were 18,956 women councillors and corporators in municipal corporations across the country.

in the states?

The situation is not much better in the States. There has been no consistency in the growth of women legislators. During 1984-85, there were as many as 141 women MLAs in various Assemblies, but their number dwindled to 62 in 1993-94. Goa returned four women MLAs out of 10 contestants, while Uttar Pradesh returned only 14 out of 260 contestants in 1993-94.

symbols of the nineties

Italian-Indian Sonia Gandhi sustains the Congress. 'Amma' Jayalalitha keeps the AIADMK in the news. Bengal tigress Mamata Banerji is synonymous with the Trinamul Congress. New-generation Dalit politics comes of age with Mayawati. Housewife Rabri Devi becomes the CM of Bihar with a little help from her husband. Sushma Swaraj is the BJP's woman of the hour.





Power to the people

AT THE TIME OF THE CHOLAS, the village or union of villages (kurram) was the basis of the administration. It managed its local affairs through an assembly (mahasabha) which had extensive powers but was answerable to the royal officers (adhipati). Members were elected for one year by casting lots.

By the end of 1990, nearly 58,000 villages in India, with nearly 600 million people, had elected more than 2,70,000 members to panchayats. Around 300 zilla parishads or district councils were also set up.

UNDER THE BRITISH the panchayats lost their relevance. Mahatma Gandhi's vision for a self-governing India — with autonomous village councils as its foundation — revived the panchayati raj dream. Fulfilling that dream has proved a challenge for Indian democracy.

MAKING THE PANCHAYAT SYSTEM democratic and strong is necessary to assess problems on the ground. How else can politicians get feedback from the people themselves?

Panchayats must tap people's power among traditionally weak groups such as the lower castes and women. But not all panchayats are effective in this sense. Often, this is due to lack of financial resources and trained personnel and because of troubled dealings with officials.

Several panchayats in north India have played a small role in community development and agricultural projects. Unfortunately, social ills such as the caste system or the submissive attitude of women creep into panchayat functioning as well. Reserving one-third of the seats for women has had success in terms of numbers, but often men still make the decisions.

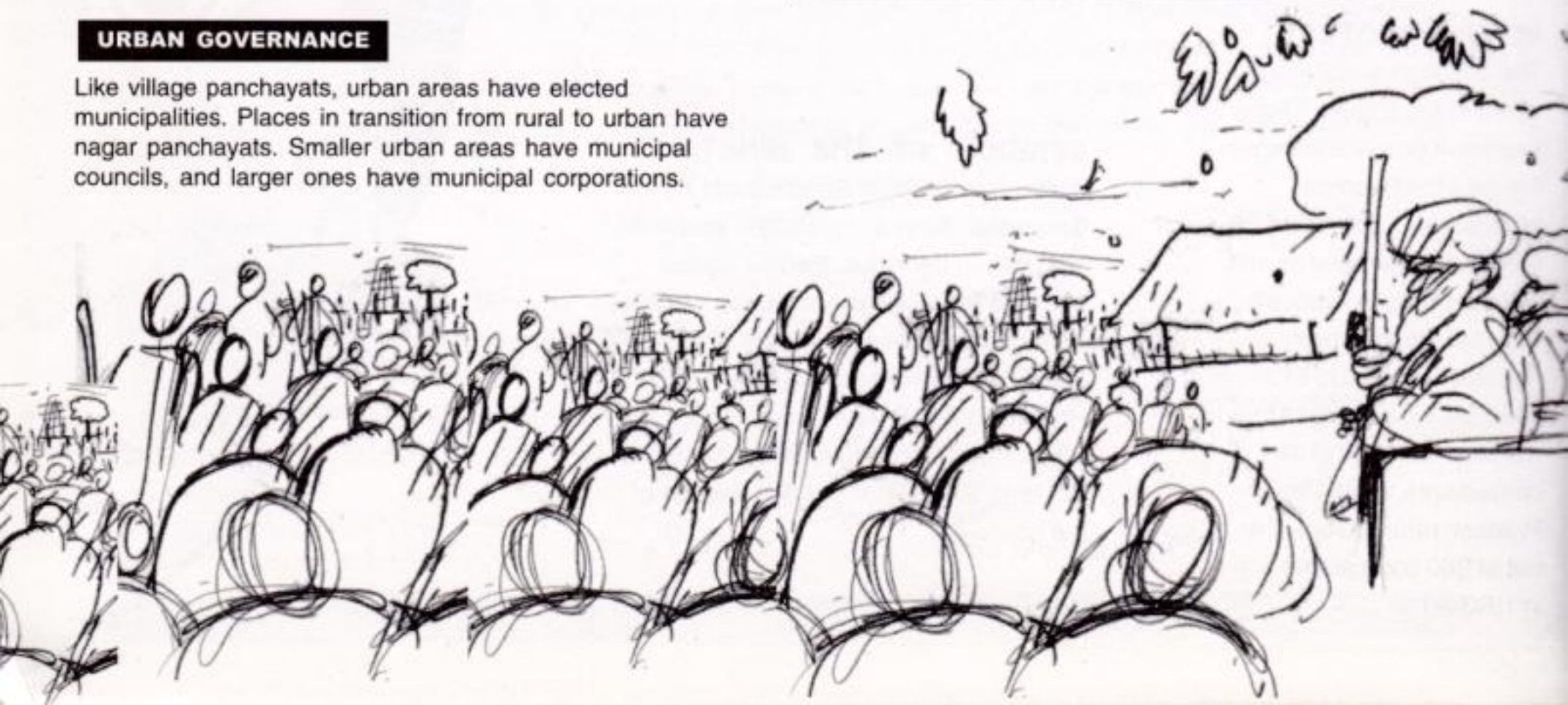
URBAN GOVERNANCE

Like village panchayats, urban areas have elected municipalities. Places in transition from rural to urban have nagar panchayats. Smaller urban areas have municipal councils, and larger ones have municipal corporations.

EVEN BEFORE the Central laws on panchayats fell into place, several States experimented with this system with varying degrees of success. West Bengal in 1978, and Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in 1987 established a new generation of panchayats which were part of the political system. They were welcomed wholeheartedly by the people in those States.

AFTER YEARS OF DEBATE, the Constitution was amended in 1993 to pave the way for decentralisation of power. It is now compulsory for all States to distribute power through a three-tiered system which has the panchayat at its base. But very few States have done so. Besides, there is concern that the legislation may lead to greater bureaucratic meddling in panchayat functioning.

According to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, panchayats and nagarpalikas — or village and town councils — are now called "institutions of self-government".



The BIGGEST Democracy

POPULATION

(1999 UN estimate)

1 billion !!

The projected population by the year 2000

1,022 million !!!

Some facts and figures

1991 Census

Population 846.3 million

Male 439.2 million

Female 407.1 million

Annual growth rate 1.8 per cent

Life expectancy

(1994) Average 62.4 years

Male 62.1 years

Female 62.7 years

Mortality (per 1000 people)

Birth rate 1995 21

Death rate 9.8

Infant mortality rate 72

Literacy 1991

National average 52 %

Male 64.3%

Female 39.29%

■ The level of male literacy in all regions is far ahead that of females.

■ The overall percentage of literacy has increased from 16.67 in 1951 to 52.21 in 1991. Male literacy rose from 24.95% in 1951 to 64.13% in 1991. In the same time-frame, female literacy rose from 7.93% to 39.29%.



RAJASTHAN

BIHAR

UTTAR PRADESH

KERALA

LAKSHADWEEP

MIZORAM

■ People without access to health services (1985-95) is 135.2 million, safe water (1990-95) is 171.3 million and sanitation (1990-95) is 640 million.

■ The estimated number of disabled people is 0.2 million and AIDS cases (1996 UN estimate) is 2 million.

LITERACY - HIGHS & LOWS

1991

38.55

38.48

41.60

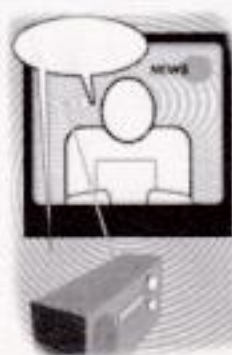
89.81

81.78

82.27

Reaching out

The 1990s have seen a remarkable growth in terms of reach and quality of newspapers. Significantly, the 10 most widely read newspapers in 1999 were all Indian language papers. The total number of newspapers in circulation in 1998 was 33,612. Of these 3,740 were dailies, 275 tri/biweeklies, 11,136 weeklies and 18,461 other periodicals. Uttar Pradesh had the largest number of newspapers (579), followed by Bihar (380), Madhya Pradesh (346) and Tamilnadu (306).



The people of India own more than **120 million** radio sets and **40 million** television sets.

India has the world's largest postal network. There are more than **150,000 post offices**. It is estimated that around 100,000 village panchayats do not have postal counters.





NUTS & BOLTS

ELECTIONS IN INDIA are on the scale of a grand festival and are very much a part of our political tradition. In fact, no other developing country has had such a long tradition of holding elections. Organising an election in a country of India's size is a challenge. **The size of the electorate is 600 million.** Some 4.5 million officials supervise the voting process in 9,00,000 polling stations, from the Himalayas to the deserts of Rajasthan, including areas that can be reached only on the back of an elephant, donkey or camel.

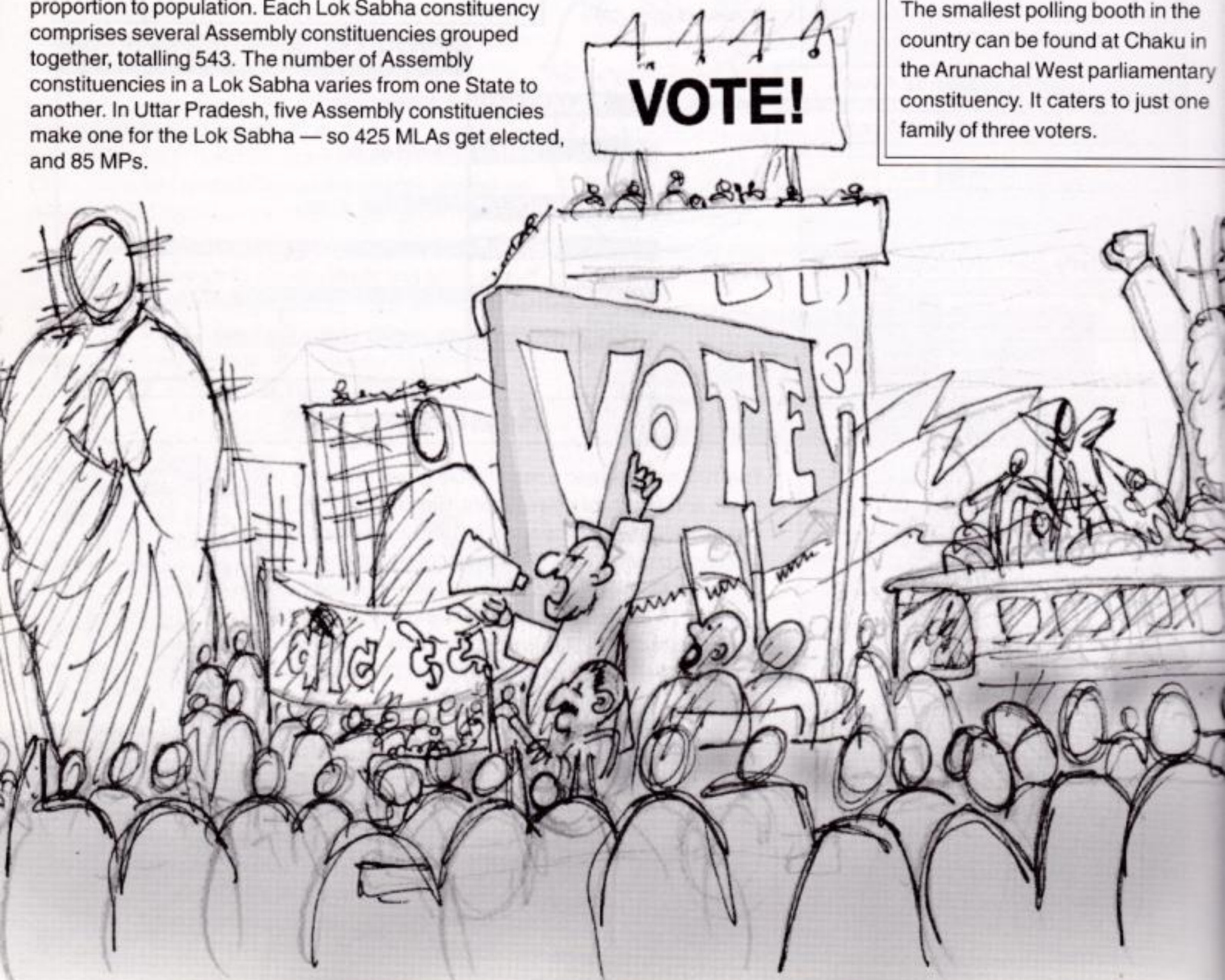
Anyone over the age of 18 is entitled to vote in any election to the Lok Sabha, Legislative Assemblies and organs of local self-government. However, not every eligible person actually votes. A voter can be kept away by work, ill-health, bad weather, names not being listed, apathy or threat and intimidation. Frequent elections could turn off voters.

Lok Sabha seats have been allotted to States in proportion to population. Each Lok Sabha constituency comprises several Assembly constituencies grouped together, totalling 543. The number of Assembly constituencies in a Lok Sabha varies from one State to another. In Uttar Pradesh, five Assembly constituencies make one for the Lok Sabha — so 425 MLAs get elected, and 85 MPs.

The average voter turnout in Indian elections has been 56.6%, varying from the low of 45.7% in 1952 to a record 64.1% in 1984.

A vote in one constituency should have as much value as a vote in any other — a principle called 'equality of suffrage'. This can be difficult in a country of such diversities as India. Every elected person should ideally represent an equal number of voters. But it doesn't always work like that. Constituencies are often divided according to administrative convenience, and sizes become unequal — e.g. there are more people voting in any one of the seven constituencies of Delhi, than in the whole of Lakshadweep which elects just one MP in the Lok Sabha. Other factors also influence constituency sizes.

The smallest polling booth in the country can be found at Chaku in the Arunachal West parliamentary constituency. It caters to just one family of three voters.



CONSTITUENCIES HAVE TO BE periodically revised. This is mainly because population grows at widely differing rates in different places. The Constitution said that these revisions should be done after each Census. But an Amendment in 1976 suspended the process until 2001. This was because States like Tamilnadu and Kerala had been successful with family planning programmes. They were worried that their reduced population would mean reduced Lok Sabha seats — not a fair deal for being progressive!

The Election Commission (EC) of India supervises the conduct of elections. It is an independent body established under the Constitution, answerable only to the President. Since October 1993, the EC has been a multi-member body with a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two Election Commissioners with equal status as the CEC. The Election Commissioner has a five-year term and cannot be removed except through impeachment. Despite political attacks and adverse court judgements, the independence and neutrality of the Commission has generally been recognised.

The EC issues directions down the line — to District Election Officers, Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and so on — through the Chief Electoral Officers of States and Union Territories. Officers are designated for the posts by their respective governments. Their tasks include the preparation of electoral rolls, the scrutiny of nominations, allotting symbols, settling disputes in election tribunals, setting up polling booths, counting and declaring the results.

To counter electoral malpractices, the EC has increasingly used its powers to order repolls at particular booths, or over whole districts and constituencies. However, in a country of India's size, it is difficult for the EC to check every abuse.

India has single-member constituencies and follows the first-past-the-post voting system. This means that only one candidate gets elected — the one who gets the most votes, which may not always amount to a majority of the electorate.

Total number of Lok Sabha constituencies: **543**

General: **423**

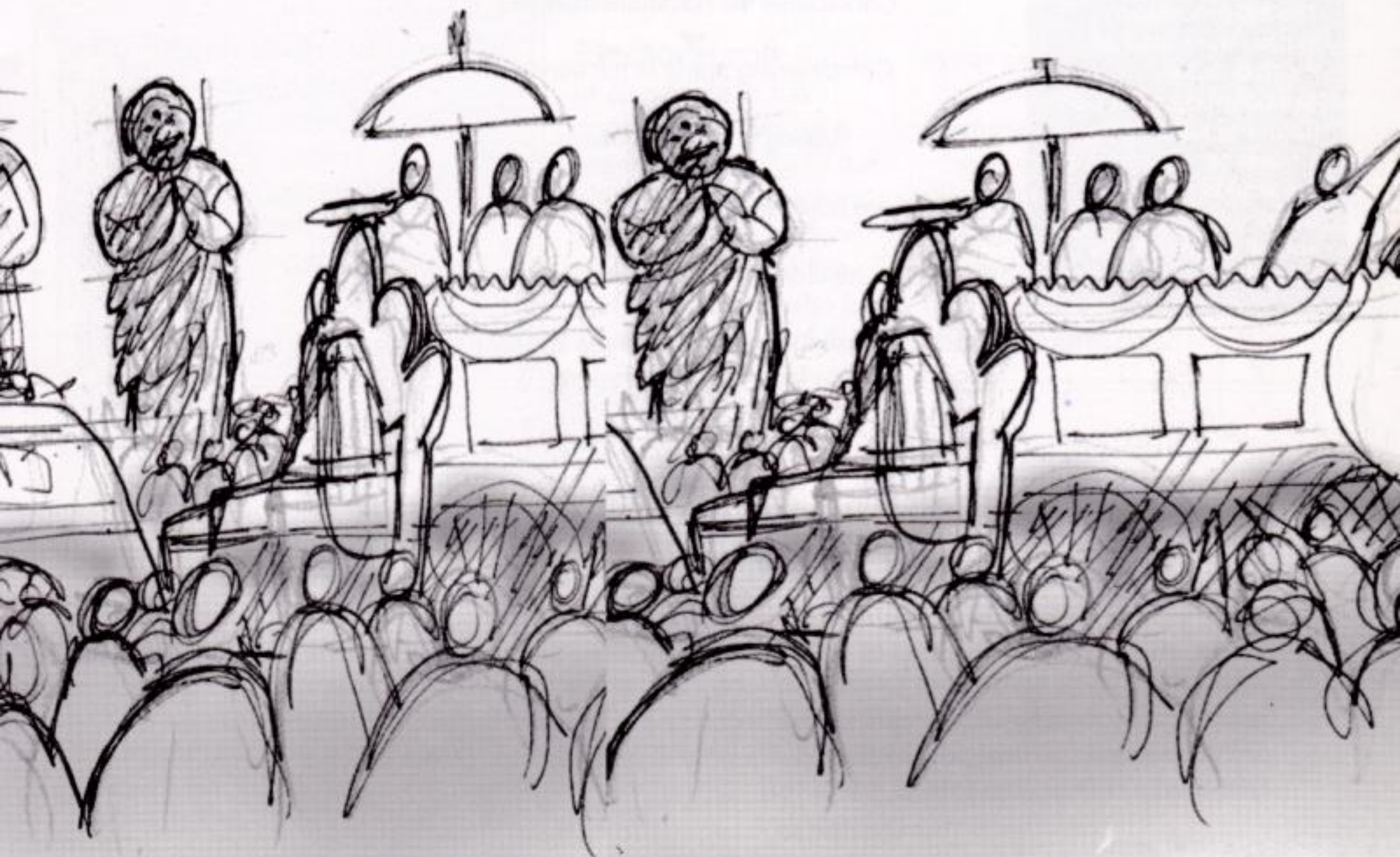
Reserved constituencies for Scheduled Castes: **79**

Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of reserved constituencies for SCs: 18

Reserved for Scheduled Tribes: **41**

Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of reserved constituencies for STs: 9

The National Capital Territory (New Delhi) has 7 constituencies. All Union Territories have one constituency each.



an elaborate exercise

Unlike the US presidential system with fixed tenures for the Legislature and the Executive, India's British-style parliamentary system has only a maximum term for both. The life of the Government in power depends on the support it has in the Lok Sabha or the Assembly.

An elected government cannot last for more than five years. But it can collapse sooner if it loses parliamentary majority. If no other party or combination of parties can form an alternative government, elections are called.

THEN . . .

The President dissolves the Lok Sabha



Who's paying for it?

The 1967 Lok Sabha elections cost Rs 11 crore, i.e. Rs 11,00,00,000.
The 1999 elections cost a staggering Rs 900 crore, i.e. Rs 900,00,00,000!

The Election Commission (EC) takes charge. It declares election dates and sets the ball rolling for the gigantic exercise — organising voters' lists, polling booths, ballot papers, etc. It sets a model code of conduct that all parties have to follow.

THERE IS A LIMIT!

The EC has set an expenditure limit of Rs 15 lakh for campaigning for a Lok Sabha candidate. In smaller constituencies, the limit is Rs 6 lakh. Some candidates are known to spend five times this.

▼
Candidates file nomination papers.

▼
Campaigning starts in full earnest.

▼
Voting is done in phases.

▼
Votes are counted at the end of the last phase.

▼
Results trickle in as counting proceeds.

▼
The President invites the leader of the single largest party or coalition to form the Government.

Every election is a turning point, an event that gets a lot of public attention. In a jocular sense, an election is a contest of wills between a citizen and a politician. One has the crucial vote — to use or to discard — that the other struggles for. An election is the best time to assess the political involvement of the ordinary citizen. It is the time to observe the games politicians and political parties play. It is a time to observe the impact of the print and broadcast media on the population.

ELECTION TIME-TABLE

In a country as huge and diverse as India, finding a period when elections can be held throughout the country can be a daunting task. While scheduling elections, the Election Commission (EC) takes into account:

- (1) **the weather** – constituencies may be snowbound during winter and remote areas cut off during the monsoons
- (2) **the agriculture cycle** – care must be taken that the planting and harvesting of crops is not disrupted
- (3) **exam schedule** – schools are used as polling stations and teachers employed as election officials
- (4) **religious festivals and public holidays** – voters will be busy elsewhere

Once the scheduling is done, the EC prepares to send out ballot boxes, set up polling booths and recruit officials to supervise the elections.

*Not now, please.
It's tea-time....*



Polling stations are set up in schools and community halls. The EC tries to ensure a polling station within 2 km of every voter. Typically a polling station handles 1,200 voters. On election day, the polling station is open for at least eight hours.

Electoral roll: the list of all people in the constituency who are registered to vote in the elections. The electoral roll is normally revised every year to add the names of those who turn 18 on January 1 of the

year or have moved into a constituency, and to remove the names of those who have died or moved out of a constituency. The EC has computerised the electoral roll in some States in the north and the east.

Every voter whose name is checked against the electoral roll is allotted a ballot paper. Inside a screened compartment in the polling station, the voter marks the ballot paper with a rubber stamp on or

near the symbol of the candidate of his or her choice. The voter folds the ballot paper and inserts it in a common ballot box which is kept in full view of the presiding officer and polling agents. The secret ballot is done.

Electronic voting machines (EVM) Around 65,000 EVMs were used in 45 constituencies in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, covering 60 million voters.

Counting of votes is done under the supervision of the Returning Officer and Observers appointed by the EC. The Returning Officer announces the name of the winning candidate.

Flower Power

When it's campaign time, political parties make a beeline for the flower shops. The Congress prefers jasmine and roses while the BJP has an eye on saffron — marigold, kanakambaram or chrysanthemum. In some cities, there were brisk sales of the BJP election symbol, the lotus, at Rs 75 a flower. Former Union Minister C. K. Jaffer Sharief ordered a 2 kg garland for Rs 800. Other candidates spelt out their names in flowers or had their portraits made in petals!

The EC distributed 338 million photo identity cards before the 1999 elections.



ELECTION PETITION

Any voter or candidate can file an election petition against malpractice during the election. The High Court tries the petition and if it is upheld it can even lead to the restaging of elections in that constituency.

Who can stand?

Any Indian citizen who is **registered as a voter** and is **over 25 years of age** is allowed to contest elections to the Lok Sabha or the Assemblies. The minimum age is 30 years for the Rajya Sabha. Candidates for the Rajya Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha should be residents of the State from which they are seeking election.

Every candidate deposits with the EC **Rs 10,000** for the Lok Sabha and **Rs 5,000** for the Rajya Sabha or Vidhan Sabha elections. **Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates pay half these amounts.** The deposit amount was raised in 1996 to reduce the number of frivolous candidates. Candidates lose their deposit if they poll less than one-sixth of the total number of valid votes in the constituency.

ASPIRANTS PER SEAT

Until the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the number of aspirants per seat had steadily increased from 3.8 in 1952 to 25.7 in 1996. Interestingly, there was a marked drop in 1998 when the number fell to 8.8 aspirants per seat.

NUMBER CRUNCHERS

FOR THOSE of you who enjoy numbers, psephology could be your idea of fun — the study of how people vote in elections. 'Psephos' in Greek means 'pebble', perhaps used for voting at one time. Before and after elections, psephologists rummage through mounds of numbers to figure out trends in mass behaviour. Wonder what they do in-between elections!

OPINION POLL

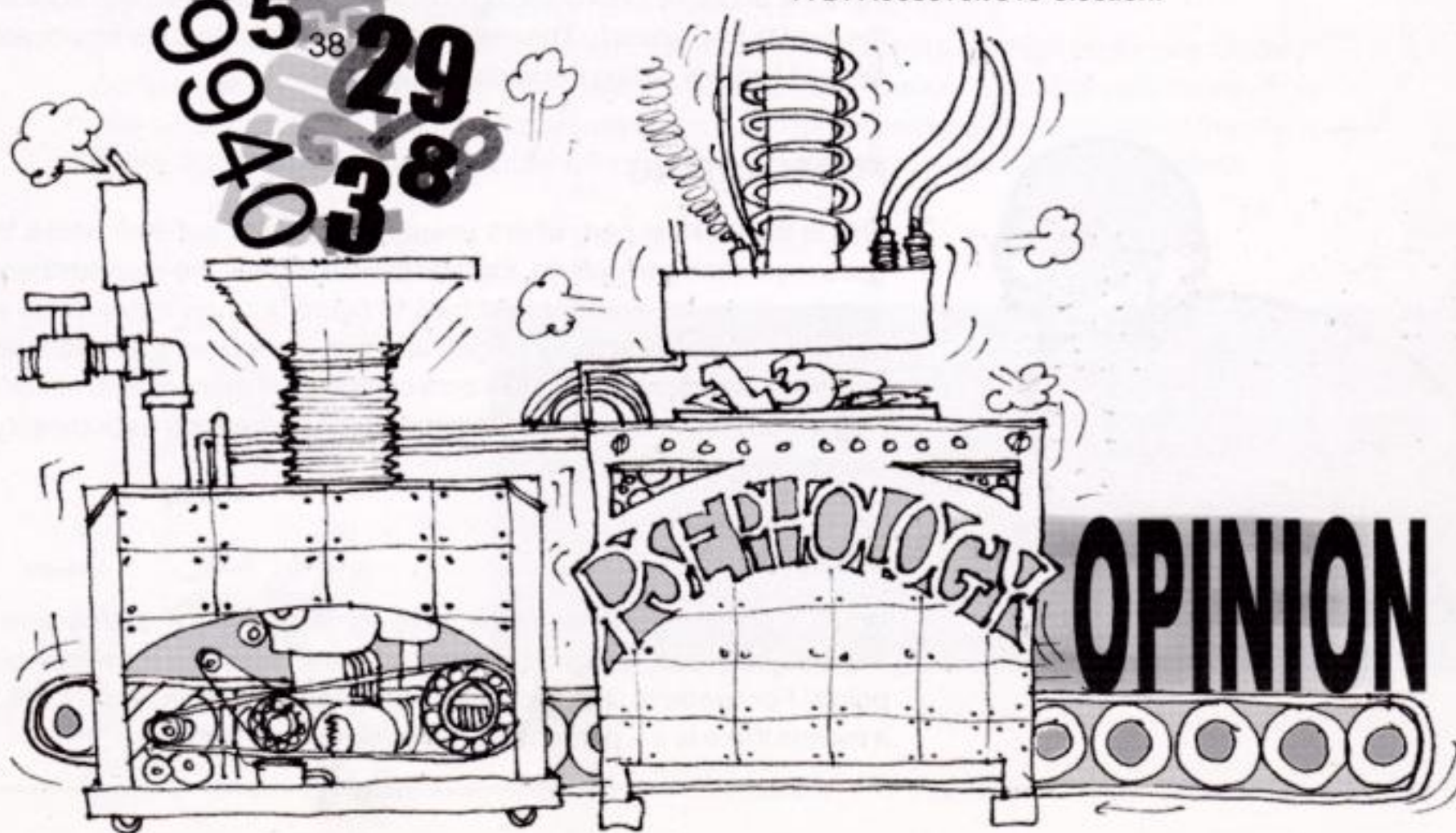
The most popular aspect of a psephologist's work is the Opinion Poll. It could be on any topic. But psephologists are particularly curious about people's voting preferences.

Pollsters select locations — constituencies and booths that would give the best flavour of a region. First they work out a strategy on paper. Then investigators fan out to interview sample voters and record their responses on all sorts of issues. Typically, questions would be "Which party would you vote for?", "Whom do you want as Prime Minister?" and so on.

All this information is crunched and digested; or in their language, collated and computed. Psephologists have to assume — if they did their homework right — that the opinion of the sample correctly reflects the opinion of the entire population.

THE GALLUP POLLS

The world's first publicised election prediction based on an Opinion Poll was done in 1936 in the USA by Dr George Gallup. He predicted, with a small margin of error, President F. D. Roosevelt's re-election.





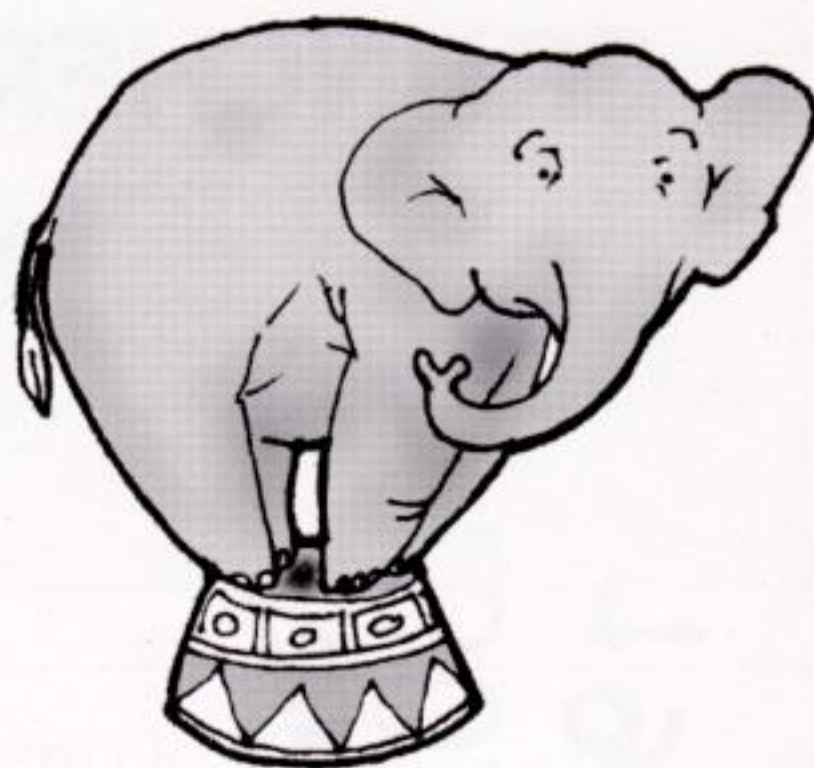
THE FIRST NATIONAL OPINION POLL before a general election was carried out by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion, New Delhi, in 1957.

Media-sponsored pre-election surveys conducted at an all-India level began in a small way in 1984. By the 1991 general election, all major newspapers and magazines had started to commission Opinion Polls.

Opinion Polls in India have generally been more accurate at the national level rather than the zonal level.

SIZE OF THE SAMPLE

In the homogeneous Western democracies, a sample of 1,000 voters would be enough to gauge voting patterns. In heterogeneous India, even a sample of 10,000 voters could be too small.



WEIGHTAGE

Sometimes, samples may not be very fair — there may have been too much, or too little, representation of some sections of society. These are corrected mathematically by giving due weightage to all groups. Complicated to explain, but it can be done.



EXIT POLL

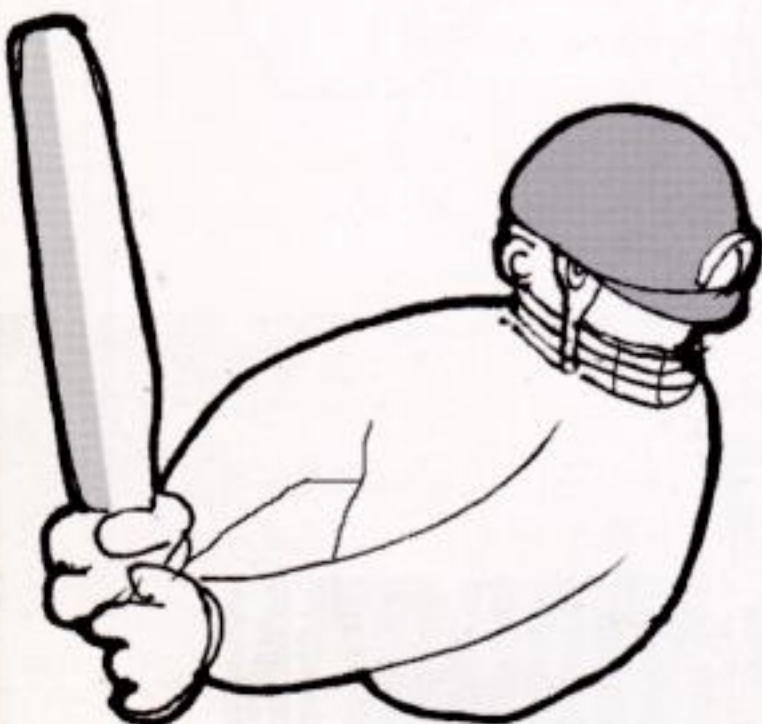
An Exit Poll is conducted on-the-spot as people come out of the polling booth after voting. They are asked who they voted for, and a quick assessment is made about who is winning. Of course, voters have to be truthful. When elections are held in several phases, the Election Commission bans exit polls after the earlier phases. But in September 1999 the Supreme Court ruled against the ban, which it said was against the right to free speech. The media is now free to publish or broadcast exit poll findings during the various phases of polling.

FORECASTING

This is the trickiest part, where psephologists stick out their necks to guess how each party will do. Election forecasting is a two-step numbers game — one, the psephologist tries to figure out how many votes a party or candidate is likely to get; and two, translates that into seat forecasts. A diverse society like ours complicates matters, and neither step is easy. They base their judgement on factors such as popularity swings and opposition unity.

SWING

When a political party becomes more (or less) popular than before, there is a 'swing' for (or against) the party. This is measured in percentage points. For example, if the votes for a party increase from 30% to 35%, it means there is a 5 percentage point swing in its favour.





INDEX OF OPPOSITION UNITY

Psephologists in India have evolved an Index of Opposition Unity (IOU). What happens when there are so many, many Opposition parties? Does it make the Opposition strong, or weak and divided? How does it affect the main parties? The IOU tries to analyse this sort of situation, and calculate it in mathematical terms.

The IOU is a way of measuring the splitting of votes — when votes get divided among far too many parties. The number of parties contesting an election, or the average number of candidates for each seat, provides a crude measure of the unity of the Opposition. In a bipolar — one-against-one — situation, the Opposition is said to be united. But in a multipolar situation, where several candidates are contesting for the same seat, there is obviously a weak Opposition unity factor. The formula goes like this:

$$\text{IOU} = \frac{\text{Vote of the largest Opposition party}}{\text{Sum of the votes of all the Opposition parties}} \times 100$$

If there were four opposition parties with vote percentages of 30, 15, 9 and 6, the IOU would be:

$$\frac{30}{30 + 15 + 9 + 6} \times 100 = 50 \quad (\text{The IOU can vary between 0 and 100})$$

Full marks for guessing what the IOU will be if there were only one Opposition party! The closer the IOU is to 100, the easier will it be for an Opposition candidate to achieve an upset win over a ruling party candidate.

SEAT ADJUSTMENTS

Opposition parties sometimes agree to fight under a single common symbol — like the Janata Party in the 1977 Lok Sabha elections. Sometimes they prefer seat adjustments. Different parties agree not to fight each other in certain constituencies. Only one of them fields a candidate whom the others support, which gives him or her a better chance of winning.

Kerala has a large number of parties. But it has an IOU of 90, the highest for any State. A perfect example of parties joining hands to create a bipolar equation, to use the right jargon. This was achieved largely through seat adjustments. Each minor party allies with either of the major fronts, the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front or the Congress-led United Democratic Front.

Should opinion polls be banned?

Opinion polls offering predictions are widely publicised. What effect does this have on the election outcome? This is a tricky question. Some believe that there could be a 'bandwagon' effect — sections of voters may be encouraged to vote for the winning side. Or there could be an 'underdog' effect — voters could feel sympathetic to the losing side.

65
1302893
79384
426

FLASHBACK!!

1998



Size of the Electorate: 605,884,103



Men
316,692,628



Women
289,191,475



STATES WITH HIGHEST NUMBER OF VOTERS

Uttar Pradesh — 10,19,82,480 (5,60,67,691 men + 4,59,14,789 women)

Bihar — 5,87,66,580 (3,11,42,308 men + 2,76,24,272 women)



LOWEST NUMBER OF VOTERS IN A PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Lakshadweep — 36,736 (19,022 men + 17,716 women)



HIGHEST NUMBER OF VOTERS IN A PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Outer Delhi — 28,80,872



NUMBER OF POLLING STATIONS IN THE COUNTRY — 7,73,667

ELECTION EXPENSES - RS. 664 CRORE

NUMBER OF BALLOT BOXES - 25,25,595

PAPER USED FOR PRINTING BALLOT PAPER - 7,700 METRIC TONNES

INDELIBLE INK USED - 16.4 LAKH LITRES

SCORE CARD

THE BJP WON 179 SEATS, POLLING 25.38% OF THE VOTE

THE CONGRESS WON 141 SEATS, POLLING 25.72% OF THE VOTE

As you can see, a larger vote share does not always mean more seats.

POLLING STATION
AT THE HIGHEST
ALTITUDE?



Leh
IN JAMMU AND
KASHMIR
(5000 METRES)

UPDATE

Democracy is a dynamic process and change is inevitable. This section makes some important updates since the last general election in 1999.

Census 2001

The 2001 Census records a total population of 1.27 billion. The population rose by 21.34% between 1991 and 2001. The sex ratio (i.e. the number of females per thousand males) was 933, rising from 927 in the 1991 Census. Total literacy rate was recorded as 65.38%.

Note the gender difference

Males 75.85%

Females 54.16%

A New President



Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam (b. 1931) was sworn in as the 11th President of India on July 25, 2002. Born in coastal Rameshwaram in Tamilnadu, Dr Kalam is an aeronautical engineer by training and is popularly described as the father of India's missile programme. He articulates dreams of making India a technological superpower.

A Growing Family

Three new States have joined the family — Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal. That means three more chief ministers, three more governments ...

Gujarat 2002

On February 27, 2002, bogie S-6 of the Ahmedabad-bound Sabarmati Express was torched at Godhra in Gujarat killing 58 Hindu pilgrims travelling back from Ayodhya, including 26 women and 12 children. What followed this grossly inhuman crime allegedly committed by a group of Muslims, should have been tackled through a stringent law and order machinery. It should never happen in any society, particularly one calling itself a democracy.

From February 28 onward, fires of hatred raged in 16 of Gujarat's 24 districts. Armed squads of the ruling BJP and its associate organisations — RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal — launched a pogrom (systematic attacks to decimate) against innocent Muslims, leading to the subcontinent's worst religious riot in recent times. Nearly 1000 people were killed, about one-tenth in police firing, and more than a lakh had to be sheltered in relief camps.

The state machinery had allowed communal passions to wreak havoc. Chief Minister Narendra Modi called the targeted attacks against Muslims a 'natural reaction'. Muslims, who constitute around 11 per cent of the population, were brutally terrorised. Business establishments were ransacked.

Gujarat has thrown an unprecedented challenge to representative democracy and the rule of law. It represented a wilful withdrawal of the state from taking responsibility for the security of its citizens. Human rights organisations say that Modi and his predecessor, Keshubhai Patel, had systematically implanted, through insidious hate propaganda and school textbooks, the mindset to justify such a pogrom. They had their men in key jobs to prevent hindrance. They used threat and intimidation to numb conscience-keepers. They trained their cadres well.

Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee called the Gujarat violence a black mark on the nation's forehead and regretted that the senseless massacre lowered India's prestige in the world.

IN BRIEF

2003

- ◆ President gives assent to Representation of People (Amendment) Bill 2002. Declaration of assets, antecedents by candidates contesting polls a must, says Supreme Court (SC).
- ◆ Union Cabinet restricts size of Union and State Council of Ministers; moves to curb 'bulk defections'.
- ◆ Lok Sabha okays Delimitation Bill that seeks to make 2001 Census basis for readjustment of electoral constituencies.
- ◆ SC upholds Haryana Govt law prohibiting person from contesting or holding panchayat post if s/he has more than 2 children.
- ◆ Assembly elections in Delhi, Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh.

Elections '99

The 1999 General Elections gave BJP & Allies 298 seats, while Congress & Allies got 135. A.B. Vajpayee got his third chance to become Prime Minister as he led the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at the Centre from 1999 to 2004.

Lok Sabha Dissolved

The 13th Lok Sabha was dissolved on February 7, 2004, several months ahead of schedule because the ruling NDA coalition apparently wanted to cash in on a so-called 'feel-good' factor. Vajpayee continued as caretaker Prime Minister till elections.

Elections 2004 ♦ Elections 2004 ♦ Elections 2004 ♦ Elections 2004

- ♦ There are about 650 million voters on the rolls. With 54% of the population under 25, over a third of the voters fall in the 18-30 years age bracket.
- ♦ Whoever wins, it's almost certain there will be a coalition government at the Centre. The age of coalition governments dawned in India in the late 1980s. It has become clear that no single party can enjoy the kind of dominance over the Indian political landscape that the Congress Party once had.
- ♦ Two broad fronts have emerged: one led by the Congress and another led by the BJP. The Left parties, strong in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura, with pockets of influence elsewhere, are slated to back the Congress since they are opposed to the politics of the BJP.
- ♦ The viability and stability of either coalition depends on the dominant partner getting at least 150 seats in Parliament. Any party winning over 200 seats acquires major clout.
- ♦ The Congress starts from a weaker position since it only won 114 seats in 1999, so it has to do sufficiently better to become the single largest party.
- ♦ There are many important players who could make or break the next government. Prime among them are Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party), Laloo Prasad Yadav (Rashtriya Janata Dal), and Mayawati (Bahujan Samaj Party).

IN BRIEF

2002

- ♦ BJP loses the Assembly polls in U.P. Congress wins in Punjab and first Assembly polls in Uttaranchal.

2001

- ♦ Former West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, (87) bows out after attending the last session of the current Assembly ending his 55-year career in electoral politics.

2000

- ♦ The President gives assent to the Constitution (19th Amendment) Act, 1999, extending reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for a further period of 10 years beyond January 25, 2000.

In the run-up to the elections scheduled for the summer of 2004, the BJP and the Congress wooed smaller regional and caste-based parties to form pre-poll alliances.

The BJP is strong mainly in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. In most other States, it is a marginal force and comes to terms with the dominant regional party there. In 1999 it had an alliance with the Akali Dal in Punjab, the Biju Janata Dal in Orissa, the Trinamool Congress in Bengal, the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and smaller regional parties in Assam and the northeast, besides having an understanding with the Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP sealed an alliance with the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in 2004.

The Congress, since it once had an all-India presence and still has political machinery in all the States, has more trouble getting into alliances since it is often in competition with the dominant regional party in a State. But now that it has been marginalised in some important States, it no longer balks at being a junior partner.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was formed by Congress stalwarts Sharad Pawar and P. A. Sangma to register their discomfort with a person of foreign origin, namely their then party president Sonia Gandhi, becoming the Prime Minister. The NCP, which runs two coalition Governments with the Congress in Maharashtra and Meghalaya, ran into trouble prior to the 2004 elections when Pawar preferred to support the Congress than the BJP. In 2003, Congress veterans from Maharashtra Vasant Sathe and N. K. P. Salve, quit party to form a new party Vidarbha Rajya Nirman Congress (VRNC), to "fight to secure a new Vidarbha state".



Keep a record of the last Indian election for this millennium . . . hopefully!

IN THE LOK SABHA

Single largest party and its tally of seats: _____

Allies of the largest party and their tally of seats: _____

If it is a coalition government, its constituents and total tally of seats: _____

The main Opposition party and its tally of seats: _____

Make a list of the other Opposition parties and their tally of seats: _____

Other influential groups and their strength: _____

The total number of parties in the Lok Sabha _____

The number of women MPs _____

The number of Independents _____

Assess the regions of strength of the BJP and the Congress. If a regional party is dominant, indicate that.

North _____

South _____

East _____

West _____

Goals for the Future

Goals are important to get ahead — in a football game or in life. In a sense, countries too need goals, short-term and long-term. The goals of a country should be set by its leadership. And citizens.

What can you do? Every citizen has a role to play in fulfilling his or her responsibilities and claiming his or her rights through the proper channels. Today, you are a citizen-in-the-making, tomorrow you will be making vital political choices. **Are you prepared?**

ACTIVE CITIZENRY

Democracy calls for widespread participation in politics by the people. An active citizenry is the best guarantee against a corrupt and inefficient government. **Citizens should help shape public opinion** by speaking out on important issues and by supporting political parties that put the people's interests above their own. All citizens should vote in local, State and national elections.

COMMON GOOD

Although all governments use force sometimes, what distinguishes democracies from authoritarian regimes is the approach towards citizens. Democracies must emphasise dialogue, negotiation and citizen cooperation. The underlying belief behind this approach is that people will **make choices that are rational and for the common good.**

SPREADING EDUCATION

Democracies function better when citizens are **well informed on public issues.** Education is an important tool that provides people access to a variety of information sources. Well-informed citizens are in a better position to think for themselves and make independent choices. While India has been a successful democracy in many respects, widespread illiteracy remains a blot on society. Let us hope that the Total Literacy Movement launched across the country yields results soon.

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

Deep division among the people on the basis of religion, caste and ethnic differences can cause political instability. In such a situation, democracy can be threatened. There should be **constant vigil against the exploitation of religious and caste sentiments by political parties.**

ECONOMIC STABILITY

A stable economy has a significant impact on the democratic functioning of governments. Many democratic governments have collapsed during economic crises. Politically conscious citizens **must be aware of signs of trouble in the economy.**

As citizens, we are very conscious of our rights. Are we aware that the Constitution also lays down the duties of a citizen?

The Fundamental Duties are:

TO abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the National Flag and the National Anthem

TO cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our freedom struggle

TO uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India

TO render national service when called for

TO promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all Indians and renounce practices derogatory to women

TO preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture

TO protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures

TO to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform

TO safeguard public property and to abjure violence

TO strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity so that the nation constantly strives to higher levels of endeavour and achievement



IN FOCUS spotlights current topics and trends. This series collates and presents information as an attractive, composite package, with special attention to the Indian experience, the Indian viewpoint. It aims to equip students with a broad-based understanding of key issues that concern us — as citizens of India and as members of the world community. Information, statistics, examples and case studies help analyse an issue with a balanced perspective. Designed for easy reading, it perks up facts with charts, line drawings, cartoons and photographs. The series is useful reference material for projects, essays, debates, discussions and general knowledge — an invaluable addition to home and school libraries.

MY VOTE COUNTS is the first book in the series. It looks at India's stature as the largest democracy in the world. What does it mean, to be the largest democracy? What does it mean to be a democracy? What rights and privileges do citizens of a democracy enjoy? What responsibilities must be shouldered in order to draw upon these rights? The book gives a historical perspective to the question of democracy. It goes on to examine the election process and current trends, offers glimpses into attitudes in other parts of the world, explains terms and supplies statistics — with a light touch and a reader-friendly style. Aimed at ages 12 and above, **MY VOTE COUNTS** is really a book for all.

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